

**Despatches *from* Finland**



BBC 1

EDWARD WARD AT BROADCASTING HOUSE

EDWARD WARD

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# Despatches *from* Finland

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I tender my best thanks and full acknowledgment to the British Broadcasting Corporation for their permission to include in this volume my broadcasts from Finland.

E.W.

## INTRODUCTION

I HAD been a BBC announcer for nearly two years before I went to Finland: but not, I'm afraid, a very good one. My reading of news bulletins had come in for a good deal of adverse criticism, and things reached a climax shortly before Christmas, 1939, when it seemed to be generally agreed that it would be better for all concerned if I read no more. Not being greatly attracted by the suggestion that I should go down to Bristol and announce programmes, I applied for a transfer to the News Department. The first question the senior News Editor asked me was whether I would care to go abroad. I said I should be delighted, and asked where. He said:

'I thought you might go to Finland.'

Thus, very unexpectedly, I found myself jerked out of Broadcasting House and transferred within a fortnight to the country where a large part of the news which I had been reading was actually being made. The time might have been even shorter if there had not been minor delays. Authority had to give its consent. I had to procure an exit permit, visas, letters from the Finnish Legation and, above all, suitable clothes.

There were a few days of appalling rush, in which I had very little time to consider how I proposed to handle things in Finland, or to wonder whether a change of air would make me a better broadcaster. Finally, on January 2nd, I took the train from Victoria to Brighton on the first stage of this trip into the unknown.

I arrived in Finland two days later armed with a large

number of letters of introduction, most of which I never used, a letter from the BBC informing all concerned that I was their accredited representative, and a vast quantity of allegedly suitable warm clothing. I had very unwisely bought in London a large, heavy leather overcoat, which I had been assured would keep out any cold. It did, more or less, but when I came to wear it in Finland I found I could scarcely walk, let alone run. I looked with bitter envy on the beautiful white sheepskin coats which other and wiser correspondents had bought in Stockholm.

My outfit also included an assortment of strange arctic garments lent me by a friend who had been on polar expeditions, and these, I am sorry to say, remained packed in a suitcase throughout my stay. But if I did not benefit from them, the Air Line certainly did, for the excess weight was terrific.

Before I had been long in Helsinki I decided that I should confine my broadcasts almost entirely to eye-witness accounts. There seemed to be no sense in broadcasting interpretations of the official communiqués, or in competing in other ways with the big news agencies. I resolved to see as much as possible and to do my best to give people in England a clear picture of what I saw.

Before I reached Finland I had imagined that the business of seeing things would be easy; that it would be simply a matter of saying I wanted to go to a particular place and being sent there within a reasonable time. But these illusions were soon shattered. The trouble was that over a hundred other correspondents had the same idea. The Finns had really let far more foreign journalists into the country than they could possibly deal with. This was particularly the case with the Scandinavians. Any little

Swedish newspaper could afford to send a representative over to Finland for a week or two, and he was given just the same facilities as a man representing a paper with a circulation running into millions. The result was that the Finns, who needed every possible man for the army, simply had not enough press officers to go round.

And there was another difficulty. No one was ever allowed near the scene of a major battle while it was in progress. The Finnish army was up against tremendously superior numbers, and they dared not let the smallest scrap of potentially useful information escape to the enemy. That is why the Karelian Isthmus was a closed book to all correspondents during the last six weeks of the war. All the information they got was from the official communiqués. They were allowed to see nothing.

I did not simplify matters by trying to broadcast only what I had seen for myself. This meant that in some ways I was worse off than the ordinary newspaper correspondents. I had to be pretty constantly on the move, and it was not always easy to put in the average of three talks a week which I aimed at. However, the method of recording the talks was an immense help. It enabled me to spend several days on a trip, sometimes collecting material for three or even four talks, and then to broadcast them all together for use in London as they were needed. The talks had to be recorded in any case, because of the British censorship ; but apart from this I think it was better to record them. The problem of timing would have made it terribly difficult to broadcast a 'live' talk, and get it fitted into a news bulletin, for instance.

Broadcasting from Finland was always precarious. It was never certain that an air-raid alarm would not inter-

fere, or that the transmitting station would not be bombed. Nothing could be really planned ahead. On the whole, I think the method worked out very well, and I felt myself to be much luckier than the two American broadcasters, who had to talk 'live' to America in the early hours of the morning—and every day, at that.

Nor would it be fair to grumble too much at the difficulty of getting to places. The Finnish authorities had a great deal to contend with. I certainly had to work hard for every trip I made, but by means of wire-pulling, pleading and arguing, I think I managed to see at least as much as any other correspondent in Finland. During the two and a half months I was out there I must have travelled between five and six thousand miles.

The fruit of these numerous and sometimes agitated journeyings is collected in this book—thirty broadcasts in all—together with some account of the circumstances in which they came to be written. The circumstances were not always comfortable or propitious. It was altogether a strange and heart-rending experience, but one which was rendered inspiring for me by the courage and cheerfulness of the Finnish people, their stoutness of heart in the face of appalling odds and their invariable kindness.

The messages themselves, I think, bear witness to this better than any formal tribute. Except for a few minor alterations, and the inclusion of certain passages which at the time the censor would not pass, they are printed exactly as they were spoken. And if at times the style should appear a little strange, it must be remembered that they were written to catch the ear rather than the eye.

EDWARD WARD

*London, April, 1940.*



# Despatches *from* Finland

## I

HELSINKI, *January 7th, 1940*

I ARRIVED in Finland on Thursday evening, thanks to what I still think was a miracle of navigation on the part of the pilot who brought our plane in from Stockholm. I'd been told to turn up at the Airline bus station in Stockholm at 8.15 in the morning, but when I got there they told me that the plane which should have been leaving at 9 o'clock wasn't going to leave until the afternoon, and they said I must be back at 1 o'clock.

The reason for the delay was that the Russians had been bombing that coast of Finland every day for some time now, but in spite of this the plane goes every day, though it generally arranges to arrive after dark. Anyway, I wandered about Stockholm in the meantime, and turned up at the bus station at 1 o'clock, and off we went to the aerodrome.

We hung around there for some time while we went through the various formalities, and finally set off in a Finnish plane. The sun was just beginning to set as we took off on a north-easterly course over Sweden. It was a beautiful, still, clear evening, and it seemed ridiculous to think that one might be getting shot at within the next couple of hours or so. But the possibility was there, and

I must say it made one think a bit. When we got to the coast of Sweden we ran into cloud, and the pilot decided that it was best to keep under the clouds. So we flew steadily at around 1,000 feet, sometimes completely blind for several minutes at a time. It was getting pretty dark by this time, but I was just able to see the coast of Finland after we had been flying for about an hour and a half. As soon as we reached the coast the pilot changed course, and how on earth he managed to find his way over a country which to me looked exactly the same the whole way, I shall never know.

It was a bleak, snow-covered, frozen countryside. Just forest and frozen lakes—lakes and forest. I don't know much about the technical side of flying myself, but an American doctor who was sitting next to me, and who told me he piloted his own plane in America, said it was the nicest piece of navigation he'd ever seen in his life.

Well, after we had been changing course and dodging about for twenty minutes or so, I saw a small light winking out of a clump of pine trees. It was the first sign of life I'd seen since we'd been over Finland. Evidently the pilot made some kind of answering signal, because almost at once the light went out, and then, after a few minutes, another one appeared, and the same thing happened; and then another and another, until suddenly I saw the notice flashed in the plane: 'Landing—fasten your belts.'

There was absolutely no sign of a landing-field or airport or anything, and just how or where the pilot proposed to land seemed a complete mystery. But, sure enough, he began to circle and get down to a few hundred feet, and then quite suddenly there was a blaze of light and

there was the airport just ahead of us. We made a perfect landing, and no sooner had the plane come to rest than just as suddenly every light went out again and we were in complete darkness.

Here I was then, on the ground—and I admit rather relieved to be there—in a country at war; in a black-out which seemed even more impressive, or perhaps one should say oppressive, after the brilliant lights of the neutral countries I had passed through on my way out.

The next thing, after once more going through Customs formalities, was a drive to Turku, or Abo. Turku is the Finnish name, Abo the Swedish. I was met by a member of the Finnish Broadcasting Company and a Professor of the University, who spoke very good English, and they proposed that when we got to Turku they would take me straight away to see some of the damage which the town had suffered since the war began. But I didn't have to get as far as Turku to see some of the signs of war. Here and there on the side of the road were bomb craters, but it was not until I got down to the harbour that I saw the real destruction that the Russian bombers had left behind them.

It was pitch dark, but a red glow came up about the harbour from the many fires caused by incendiary bombs. Turku is a biggish port from which a lot of the dairy produce of Finland is exported, and the whole waterfront was lit up for hundreds of yards by a big warehouse which had been blazing for four days. I walked along the quay between the warehouse and the water, and although it was a bitterly cold night, one could not go within yards of the building. Inside it was like an inferno; every now and then sparks shot out of where the windows had been, as a beam or piece of rafter fell to the ground.

Just a little farther along the water-front was a sunken steamer which looked as if it had been caught amidships by a bomb, and which was lying half submerged, frozen hard into the river. Every few yards was a great gaping hole in the ground which told where a bomb had fallen, and the whole place was a tangled mass of twisted machinery. As far as one could see, the quay was an appalling picture of destruction. Derricks and cranes were lying in all directions tangled up with broken barrels and cases, paving-stones and chunks of masonry. They told me that the Russians had dropped several hundred bombs in the harbour district of Turku.

Then I was taken to see the damage done to the historic old castle, and there I'm glad to say it wasn't as bad as I had feared it would be. A bomb had struck one corner of a wing of the castle and, as far as I could see in the comparative darkness, had caused a certain amount of damage; another had just missed the other corner of the same wing by about ten feet, and made a big hole in the ground there, and blown in all the windows. A lot of damage had been done to buildings near the castle—mostly workmen's houses, and many of them were still smouldering. There was also a tremendous blaze in a factory quite near which had been hit in a raid that very afternoon when about a dozen bombs had been dropped. That was a minor affair compared with some of the others, but all the same it made me feel extremely thankful that they *had* delayed that plane.

Afterwards we went and had some dinner in an hotel in the centre of the town. We had an excellent meal; food doesn't seem to be scarce—in particular there is plenty of butter. After dinner my hosts said that if I didn't feel like the journey to Helsinki that night I could easily stay

there, and furthermore they could positively guarantee me an air-raid the next day. But I said I thought I'd better be getting along to Helsinki just the same, and that in any case I'd probably have all I wanted of air-raids before I was through. And so, soon afterwards, we got a car and drove to the station. When I say drove I should say crawled. I think it was the slowest drive I've ever known. First of all, the black-out was the blackest I have ever been in; added to which the lights of the car were microscopic, and it is practically impossible to see other cars because they are almost all painted white for camouflage and are practically invisible against the snow. However we did get to the station eventually.

The train from Turku to Helsinki always travels after dark nowadays, because in daylight there is always the danger of bombing and even more of machine-gunning from the air. I expected to find it very crowded, but surprisingly enough it was comparatively empty, and I got a whole compartment to myself.

Soon after we started I found that the American doctor who had travelled over in the plane with me from Stockholm—he's over here for the Red Cross—was also on the train, and he told me that he had been having his first look at a Finnish hospital at Turku. He told me he was very impressed not only with the hospital itself, but in the way it was run. It was a fine big hospital, he said, and he added that 150 wounded Finnish soldiers had been brought in that day. They were mostly shrapnel and splinter cases, and apart from their wounds were in remarkably good health and very cheerful.

The train was quite well lighted inside, and after a while we went along to the restaurant car, where the lights were

much brighter for some reason. You could see to read there quite easily. We had some beer, but first we had to order some sandwiches. You are allowed as much beer as you like in Finland provided you eat something as well, but they think that three glasses of schnapps—that is the local spirit—is enough, and that is all you are allowed to have.

After various stops the train eventually drew into Helsinki station, more or less on time, at about a quarter to one in the morning. And I was extremely grateful to be met at the station and taken to the Kaemp Hotel, where luckily they had a room for me; I was more than ready for bed.

Rather late the next morning I was walking downstairs when the first person I ran into was an old friend, Vernon Morgan, who has been Reuter's special correspondent here since the beginning of the war. In fact, he told me that he got here on November 30th right in the middle of the first big raids. The Kaemp Hotel, by the way, is the most extraordinary place at the present time; it was started by a German a great many years ago and, except for the addition of modern plumbing, has rather retained its early nineteen hundreds atmosphere. But that atmosphere is being rather severely shattered just now by the fact that the Kaemp is now the centre in Helsinki of the Press of the world.

Newspaper men, agency men, photographers, representatives of news-reels throng its corridors and rooms at all hours of the day and night. You hear I don't know how many different languages, and how on earth the staff and particularly the telephone girls manage to cope with the situation is more than I can understand. A big room on the first floor is set aside as a Press Room, which is used as a sort of common-room by Englishmen, Frenchmen, Belgians, Americans, Scandinavians, oh, and almost any

other nationality you like to think of, who meet there, particularly every evening to receive the official communiqués. Of course, journalists are going from time to time to the various fronts, but this hotel is their headquarters in Finland. Sooner or later they get back here.

Helsinki is comparatively empty these days, but you wouldn't think so if you went down to the dining room any evening. It is absolutely packed with Government officials, Finnish Army officers on leave, and the journalists. And every now and then a boy will come in with a 'Your call to Copenhagen' or 'Your call to Stockholm,' and up will get a journalist to file his evening's story.

In the early days of the war this was the only hotel open in Helsinki, but now several others have re-opened as well as have some of the restaurants. One of these is particularly popular because it's in a cellar, and you can carry on with your meal if there is an air-raid alarm. And that's a better proposition than running out into the street and diving into one of the shelters in the open squares and places. They are pretty cold spots to spend an hour or two in.

To-day, by the way, was the coldest they have had so far this winter. In the woods just outside Helsinki it was 30° below freezing. I'm still trying to find someone to tell me the equivalent between Centigrade and Fahrenheit. 30° of frost Centigrade is, I am told, 50° of frost Fahrenheit, which is 18° below zero. So you can imagine I found it pretty chilly when I went to look round Helsinki this morning. Luckily we haven't had a raid for some days now, but I wanted to take a look at what had happened in some of the earlier ones. There hasn't been much damage to many parts of the town, but a great deal was caused in the very early days of the war down near

the harbour. I went that way first of all and saw the Technical School, a fine big building, which has been very badly hit. There the Russians had dropped high explosive and incendiary bombs which completely gutted the building. It burned for days. Then there is a block of flats opposite the school which had had a direct hit, and it looks as though an enormous blunt knife had taken a great slice out of it. Five floors have just gone—all that is left of them is a tangled mass of iron and rubble. On the sort of rough gable which is left you can still see bits of a staircase; a forlorn-looking bath has somehow managed to remain jammed in a corner four floors above ground level; on another floor is a pathetic looking chair.

On the other side of the square there is the German school with not a window left in it and with its entire face pock-marked by flying splinters. Some of the houses a little distance away from where the bombs fell seem at first sight to be undamaged. But if you look more carefully you will see that they too have scarcely got a single pane of glass left in the windows. Included among these is, ironically enough, the former Russian Legation.

Then I went out into the suburbs. I saw a hospital which had been badly smashed; three bombs had fallen within a few yards of it. One had fallen among a clump of trees—birch trees about forty feet high—and had snapped them off at the ground just like matches. A little Ford 8-horse-power car was sitting, completely gutted, just outside the door. Every window was blown in and the walls were pitted all over by splinters.

From there, back into the town, presumably in an attempt to hit the railway station, the bombs had left the same trail of destruction. One had fallen in the yard of a



food distributing centre and had smashed the place up badly, but one of the workmen told me that though it had certainly rather interrupted work for a time they hadn't taken long to get things patched up, and the business was soon in full swing again. And sure enough, the lorries were in the yard unloading their supplies from the country.

*In retrospect, LONDON*

IT had taken me a few days to get settled down in Helsinki. There were a lot of things to do. I had to get all the necessary Press facilities fixed up with the Post Office, and go and see the Broadcasting people to find out what arrangements had been made there. I had to meet all the officials connected with the Press, and to find out exactly what the censor would pass and what was ruled out. In fact there was quite enough to keep me busy for a couple of days.

Then I settled down and wrote up my first broadcast, which was much too long and had to be given out eventually in two parts. Having said all I wanted to say about Helsinki for the time being, I thought I had better go to one of the fronts and see something of the war.

I was under the entirely erroneous impression that all I had to do was to go through the formality of asking permission. I very soon found out my mistake. My application remained unheeded for two days, and then I was told that while a visit to any front was quite out of the question for the present, I could go and see some refugees or else visit a Russian prisoners-of-war camp. Neither of these suggestions was exactly what I wanted, but I thought that the Russian prisoners would be better than staying in Helsinki.

HELSINKI, *January 10th, 1940*

IT has been quiet in Helsinki for the last few days in spite of an assurance on the Moscow wireless on Sunday night that the city was going to be given a lesson on the next day. So, with two other journalists, an Englishman and an American, I took the opportunity to go and have a look at a Russian prisoners' camp 'somewhere in Finland.' A car came to the hotel at seven o'clock in the morning to take us along.

We had a long drive of about 150 miles ahead of us, and we left Helsinki in the half light before dawn along a beautiful wide concrete road which had been pretty well cleared of snow by snow-ploughs. The chauffeur drove at what seemed to be an appallingly dangerous pace on the very slippery surface, but I was somewhat reassured when he told me that he was the veteran motor-cycle racer of Finland, and had had several records to his credit. And certainly we managed to reach our destination without mishap, except for the time when we met a snow plough round a sharp corner and had to swerve into the ditch. But we got out of it all right.

It was snowing slightly most of the time, so there were no Russian aeroplanes about, and the driver assured us that

we would have nothing to fear from 'Molotoff's eggs', as they are called here. The Russian aeroplanes are rather fond of swooping down and machine-gunning cars on the roads, and several of my friends here have had to jump out in a hurry and take cover among the pine trees. However, as I say, nothing of this sort happened, and we finally drew up in a clearing in the forest, where we saw a group of wooden buildings surrounded by a high, double barbed-wire fence. So we knew we had arrived at the camp.

We were met by the commandant of the camp, who first of all insisted that we should have lunch with him in his house, which was in another little clearing just outside the barbed-wire enclosure. We had an excellent and typical Finnish meal of eggs, ham, various kinds of fish, and coffee which is first-rate all over the country. Then we went into the prison camp. This was originally, and for that matter still is, an ordinary prison for Finnish civil offenders, and at the moment there are only twenty or thirty Russian prisoners of war. However, there is room for about 500 altogether, and I expect it will soon be pretty full, judging from the number of prisoners that were taken the other day.

The prisoners now are mostly officers from the Russian Air Force, but there are also a few officers and men who have been captured from tanks. We all particularly wanted to see what sort of men these Russian officers are, and I cannot say, after seeing this lot, that I came away impressed. They are an average sample—at least I see no reason to suppose that they are not—and they certainly compare very unfavourably with the officers of any other nation I have ever seen.

We wanted to interview them separately, as we thought that they would be more likely to be expansive in that way

than if we talked to them in groups; so we sat in the commandant's office until they brought the first one in. He was a little, Mongolian-looking Tartar. I asked him what his rank was, and he replied that he was a first lieutenant pilot officer. He was rather scared of talking at first because he said he had a wife and a one-year-old child back in Russia, and he feared something might happen to them if his name came out. But when he was assured that we weren't in the least bit interested in his name and had no intentions of using it he talked quite freely. He had been brought in only the day before, having been captured two days earlier when his bomber had been shot down by Finnish fighters. There were three in his plane, but the other two had been killed, whilst he had escaped by parachute.

This man had rather a good pair of boots on, so I asked him if they came from Russia. He said Oh no, they had been given to him by the Finns. His own heavy flying boots—I saw some others, and they looked as if they were made of goat skin—had fallen off as he was coming down in the parachute, and he had walked ten kilometres with some of his clothing wrapped round his feet before he gave himself up. He said they had all been told that the Finns shoot their prisoners, though he had always found it hard to believe. It was his first flight over Finland, incidentally, and he said he was glad to be out of it. I asked him what he would do if he were given the option to return to Russia and he said, laughing, that he'd prefer, at any rate, to stay where he was until he saw how things turned out. Asked about food in the camp, he said it was all right, but he personally preferred the Russian food he had had at his base near Leningrad, where he said that the Air Force food

was quite good, though he had heard that the army food was bad.

Well, it was more or less the same story with all whom we spoke to. I went to the hospital section of the camp and saw one officer who was an observer and who had his leg broken coming down by parachute. He said he would certainly go back to Russia if he had the chance, but he added that of course he wouldn't have to fight again, and naturally he wanted to see his wife and children in the Caucasus, where he came from.

And then there was a captain in the Tank Corps. I asked him what his job in civil life had been, and he said he was a street cleaner in Leningrad. I said can you rise to be a captain in the Russian Army so quickly, to which he replied: ' Oh yes, in a couple of months or so . . . '

These replies were all typical of those which I got from a number of others. There was no enthusiasm for the war; they did not believe stories of Finland constituting a danger to Russia, and they all regarded the puppet Finnish Government set up by the Russians as a farce.

The prisoners slept in biggish, airy rooms, the officers on two-tiered iron bunks and the men on wooden ones. In the officers' room I saw a home-made chess board and men which they had made for themselves. A lot of Russian books had just arrived for them from Helsinki, by the way. In the daytime they all worked at sawing and splitting firewood.

Before I left I asked about what food they got. I was told it was exactly the same as the Finnish civil prisoners who were there. They were given two hot meals and one cold one, with fish, meat and potatoes frequently; their daily allowance of bread was 2 lbs. and of *butter* about

3 ozs. I told the commandant that the butter allowance was almost as much for one day as people in England were allowed for one week ! And he replied: ' Well, why don't you stay here ! '

By the way, I don't think I mentioned that while we were having lunch two Russian aeroplanes flew over quite low—under a thousand feet. They didn't tell us that until afterwards.

*In retrospect, LONDON*

ON January 12th, after I had been in Finland just over a week, I heard my first air-raid alarm in Helsinki. I was lunching at the time with Richard Busvine of the *Chicago Times*. We were only half way through our meal, but we were unceremoniously turned out of the restaurant, because that was the rule.

We went out into the open square outside the Kaemp Hotel. Someone said they had heard an aeroplane, but nothing appeared, and we just hung about near the shelters for a while. There were a lot of military police about fifty yards away, and one of the journalists made a snowball and threw it at them. This started a tremendous snowball fight in which the police were badly routed. The Minister of Propaganda happened to be passing and got a large snowball on the back of the neck ! He took it very well ; he was a most good-natured man. But I should have liked to see it happen to a Cabinet Minister anywhere else !

The next day we were lunching at the same place, when at almost exactly the same time there was another alarm.



Picture Features

EDWARD WARD BROADCASTING FROM HELSINKI AT THE  
SCENE OF A FIRE CAUSED BY INCENDIARY BOMBS





This time, we thought, we'd finish our lunch at all costs. So, resisting the efforts of the waiters to turn us out, we went on eating. We had finished in a couple of minutes, and by this time the whole restaurant was completely empty. We got up to get our coats, and the next thing we heard was a succession of crashes as the bombs came tumbling down. This was alarming, to say the least of it, and we moved a bit more quickly. There was no snowballing that day. We stood near the shelters again, but nothing more happened.

Presently we saw a Press car which took us along to the scene of the bombing. It was about twenty minutes after it had actually happened. The first thing we saw was a big yellow patch in the snow in the middle of a street, about five hundred yards from the Kaemp Hotel, where an incendiary bomb had fallen quite harmlessly. About another quarter of a mile farther on we began to see the signs of real damage. All the metal roofs of a street of houses were cluttering up the street itself, and we had to stop the car and get out and walk. Another street, running at right-angles, had been very badly hit; several bombs had fallen on houses, and some had fallen in the middle of the street itself. Most of the houses were small shops, and their goods were scattered all over the place. Cascades of sweets had poured out of one on to the pavement. Another was a cheap little draper's shop. Yards of ribbon had come unrolled and were entangled with stockings, underclothes and a variety of other oddments. It was a most pathetic scene of destruction. All the windows in the street and for a long way round were smashed.

Down by the waterfront a fierce fire was burning in a warehouse. The fire brigade was doing its best to get it

under control, but the buildings were wooden and they didn't seem to be making much headway. In the street I saw the Finnish Broadcasting Company's recording van. They had a long microphone lead running right up to the fire, and they asked me if I'd like to make a record. So I got as near as I could and did my best to describe what had happened and what was actually going on. It was rather a difficult job because I was nearly choked by smoke and steam, and there was a lot of noise. But when I heard the record later it didn't sound as bad as I had been afraid it might. So far as I know it had the distinction of being the first radio eye-witness account of a bombing.

That night I went to Viipuri. It promised to be an exciting trip, because the last party who had been there very nearly didn't come back. A shell landed twenty yards ahead of their car on the road. Luckily for them it was a dud. But the censor wouldn't let them say so, because the Russians were encouraged to believe that all their ammunition was good. So they had to say that the shell exploded in the other direction. It would have been a very obliging shell !

VIIPURI, *January 15th, 1940*

I AM talking this evening from Viipuri, on the Mannerheim Line, where I came from Helsinki yesterday. I had intended to talk *about* the Mannerheim Line, part of which I was shown round yesterday, but the idea has rather been put out of my head by the really terrific air-raid which we've just been through here to-day.

It was very bad weather, and that in Finland means it was a bright clear morning and everyone knew that an air-raid was inevitable sooner or later. However, we waited a long time and were just about deciding that perhaps it was a bit cold for the Russians—it is twenty-five below zero Fahrenheit to-day—when suddenly the alarm sounded. I was in the hotel at the time and was just going to get my overcoat when I was met by a crash of breaking glass and blown backwards by the blast from a most terrific explosion. Five bombs, I think they were 150 kilo ones, had simultaneously hit a street of poor working-class wooden buildings not thirty yards from where I was. Well, I scrambled through broken glass to get my coat because you can't exist outside in that sort of temperature without one, and, fully expecting a repetition at any moment, rushed out into the street to get to the air-raid shelter.

There was a roar of aeroplane engines overhead as I ran along. The whole street was a mass of broken glass—great thick sheets of plate glass from shop-windows, and one had also to look out for pieces falling out of high-up windows. However, I got to the shelter without mishap. It was filled with the local inhabitants, whose behaviour over the whole matter was one of the most impressive things I have ever seen in my life.

I don't know how any other crowd would behave in similar circumstances, but it makes you think when you remember that these people are constantly going through this kind of thing, and they are going through it with a very comparatively small chance of hitting back. I should imagine that it is not particularly pleasant to be mixed up in an air-raid even if you know that you have first-rate anti-aircraft guns and plenty of fighter planes to go after the raiders. But here this is by no means the case, and the way these people take the whole thing as just part of the day's work is truly amazing. There they were talking and laughing away down in this shelter as though they were just taking cover from rather an annoying shower of rain which was lasting rather a long time. I kept on poking my head out of the shelter to see if anything further was happening. I heard the drone of aeroplanes for some time, but when that stopped I went out to have a look and see what damage had been done. I could do this as I wore a Press armlet, which entitles you to go out in the streets during air-raids if you feel that way inclined.

I only had to go round the corner to see the beginning of it. There was a street of workmen's wooden houses almost entirely destroyed—it's an extraordinary thing that the Russian bombers have hit practically nothing but poor

workmen's houses in their almost incessant raids and shellings of this town. But there it is, and to-day's raid—which, incidentally, was one of the worst they have had—was no exception. In this little street, as a matter of fact, there was just one small *stone* house, and apart from all the windows being blown to bits it hadn't actually been hit. The poor little wooden ones had come down like playing-card houses.

The street was indeed a pitiable sight; some of the houses were little shops, and everything, just as I had seen in Helsinki, was strewn all over the street. One shop had evidently been a tailor's, which produced a tragi-comic relief in the shape of a tailor's dummy, leaning drunkenly against a smashed-in cupboard, with its trousers blown off and its shirt-tails blowing in the wind.

Well, that is my first real experience of an air-raid, at close quarters at any rate, and at quite close enough quarters for my own liking. About twenty-five planes took part in the raid; I think it worked out that they averaged a private dwelling each and hit nothing of any real importance to them. A large number of people were injured, and so far as I have heard, two were killed.

HELSINKI, *January 17th, 1940*

IT'S taken me just over twenty hours to get back to the comparative peacefulness of Helsinki from Viipuri, because the train was delayed for the whole night while the line was being repaired. And that meant a journey all through the day, which must needs be the most beautiful day imaginable, without a cloud in the sky. We had to sit in a very hot train with our overcoats on ready to rush out and take cover if the air-raid alarm was sounded, which is three blasts on the engine's whistle.

It was a pretty tense journey, because every time the whistle sounded once, which it always does when the train is approaching a station, we all expected two more blasts to follow. But for some reason the Russian planes were not active that day, for which I was extremely thankful, because being machine-gunned by power-diving aeroplanes is a most unpleasant experience, I'm told. The Russians will go to tremendous trouble to machine-gun even single persons if they can see them against the snow, and I heard a story in Viipuri of a man who was shot at in this way. He took cover behind a boulder, and the aeroplane swooped down at him and he ran round the other side of the boulder. Well, a kind of game of hide-and-seek

went on while the plane made three dives at him, spattering the rock and the ground all round him with machine-gun bullets. He had a miraculous escape; two bullets went through his sleeves, one hit his gas-mask, and the other glanced off the hunting knife which all Finns carry.

But now let me tell you a little about the famous Mannerheim Line. It's a bit of a problem to talk about such a big subject in the short time I have available, and I could talk for hours about even the comparatively small sector which I saw. First of all, it isn't anywhere a continuous line in the sense that the Maginot Line is. It doesn't have to be. That part of Finland has wonderful natural defences and the Finns have put all of these to the best possible advantage. Like nearly all of Finland, the country is almost all forests, lakes and swamps, and the lakes have been connected up with a system of block houses and machine-gun emplacements in such a way as to cover the entire front without wastage of men.

Right from the front to Viipuri is line after line of defences. Here and there great areas of forest have been cut down in such a way that the stumps of the trees act as tank traps, and the trees themselves, which have fallen in all directions, act as an obstacle for infantry. Then there are countless lines of great boulders weighing several tons each, cut out of the natural granite of the country. These make impassable obstacles for even the heaviest tanks, whilst all among these rocks are barbed-wire entanglements to hamper infantry who might try and get the boulders out of the way of the tanks.

We drove out to the divisional headquarters of this particular sector of the front over the usual snow-covered roads. This was some distance from the actual front line

itself, but I could hear the booming of artillery as I went into the colonel's room in the farmhouse which serves as headquarters. The colonel was a big, tough, jolly-looking fellow, and we all had quite a long talk with him before we went out to have a look around. He said that in his opinion there would be no serious fighting on the isthmus for some time, because the railway from Leningrad up to the front had been cut and repairs were being constantly hampered. There were about 400,000 Russian troops facing the Finns on this front, and he added that although this seemed to be an enormous number, it actually had its advantages, as it provided the Russians with a terrific problem as far as supplies were concerned. Their food, he said, was of very poor quality, from what he had seen taken from prisoners. I saw some empty *pate de foie gras* tins on his table which were being used as ash trays, and I remarked that it didn't seem to be the case on *his* side of the line. He roared with laughter and said no, they were still able to do themselves pretty well.

Then we went out to look around. First we saw a number of dug-outs and shelters. They were so well concealed that you would never know they were there until you were right on top of them. The whole forest looks perfectly normal. Some of these shelters are just tents built under the pine trees and camouflaged with branches. The floor is dug a few feet into the ground, and they are absolutely invisible from the air. Now a tent doesn't sound a very attractive proposition in a temperature of about thirty below zero, which was what it was that day, but when you crawl inside it's almost too warm. There is a red-hot wood stove and the chimney is arranged cunningly so that the smoke curls up the trunk of a tree and is almost invisible



even from the ground. These tents hold twenty men, as do the rather more elaborate shelters they have in this part of the line, which are dug deep into the earth and covered with layers of huge logs and earth. These are fitted up with bunks and are proof against any size shell which is likely to hit them.

Some of the soldiers in these shelters were just back from the front line and were having a rest; I've never seen a finer looking or more cheerful lot of fellows. Another thing which greatly impressed me was the amazing spirit which seems to exist between officers and men. The colonel in particular seemed tremendously popular with all of them. In fact, rather an amusing thing happened when I offered some cigarettes to a sentry. He refused, but the colonel said: 'Go on, take them.' Then he turned to me and said: 'They're not allowed to accept things from people, but I've told him it's all right and what I say goes around here.' Or rather, the equivalent of all this in French, which he spoke very well. By the way, as well as shelters for men, there were also underground stables for horses all over the place.

I was lucky enough to go in the colonel's car when we went farther up the line. He gave the usual injunction before we started, to be ready to jump out and take cover at once if the Russians started shelling or machine-gunning from planes. He said the Russian artillery was extremely erratic, and you never knew when or where they were going to start shelling, but that this particular road was rather a favourite of theirs. Certainly, splintered trees and wrecked farm buildings bore witness to this. At one point we stopped to look at a Russian bomber which had been shot down by fighters. There wasn't much to see, as it had been

brought down with a full cargo of bombs, which had exploded when it landed, and bits of aeroplane were all over the field.

All the way were line after line of defences, and the log shelters now gave way to reinforced concrete block-houses. Artillery fire became louder and louder, but they assured me that this was a comparatively quiet afternoon, and certainly no shells came near us.

What I have now seen of the Mannerheim Line has made me think that the Russians are up against a tough proposition on this front, and they have got a series of obstacles in front of them which will give them plenty to think about.

*In retrospect, LONDON*

THAT train journey in daylight back from Viipuri was the first—but by no means the last—which I was to make under the threat of machine-gunning or bombing. Later on, the idea of wearing an overcoat in a hot train would have seemed ludicrous. But at the time it all seemed very dangerous. This was largely because a little Finnish Press officer kept on coming into the carriage with horrific stories of what happened when a train was machine-gunned. In the end Richard Busvine told him that if he couldn't think of anything more cheerful to talk about he'd better stay out of the carriage. He had not been at all responsive to hints, but after this he kept away for the rest of the journey.

In fact, nothing at all happened, but it was a very tense journey. We found ourselves constantly studying the countryside to see what sort of cover it provided. When

we were going through fairly thick forest we felt better, and the big boulders with which the country was dotted looked comforting. But a barbed-wire fence between the track and the forest was a depressing sight. We imagined ourselves tearing our clothes to pieces in a frantic effort to get into the woods.

This was the first time the food problem had presented itself to me. There was no restaurant car on the train. The Finnish word for a restaurant is *ravintola*, and the word had for me an Italian sound, conjuring up visions of blue skies and hot sun, cypresses and tables under huge umbrellas. Nothing could have been further from reality. The station *ravintolas* were just station buffets, always packed to bursting point with troops, and with a handful of overworked girls doing their best to cope with an impossible situation behind the bar. Fortunately, on this trip I had had the foresight to buy a large garlic sausage in Viipuri, and this kept me sustained and aromatic until we arrived in Helsinki.

HELSINKI, *January 18th, 1940*

YESTERDAY the Russian newspapers came out with the somewhat surprising statement that Helsinki has never been bombed. This was followed up by a similar announcement on the wireless, in Finnish, from Moscow yesterday evening. It was further emphatically added that most certainly no workmen's houses had been touched. All this set me to thinking that maybe I've been dreaming since I've been out here; and so to make sure I went out to look at some of the workmen's houses which most definitely *have* been hit, and I talked to some of the people who are still fortunate enough to be able to live in their homes, as well as to others who are not so lucky.

The first place I saw got off comparatively lightly. A bomb fell about fifty yards from the block of workmen's flats, which had all its windows blown in. But these have been patched up meantime, and the people are able to live in them again. There were three women in the ground-floor flat I visited. The men were all at work. The women were knitting as we went into the room, and they had to work by artificial light as the windows were boarded up because most of the glass had been blown in by the explosion. I asked them various questions with the help of my interpreter. They said they had been lucky enough to get into a cellar

in the yard before the bomb fell, and when they came up they found three people badly hit in the yard, whilst out in the street four people had been killed. One of the women was about seventy and she just sat knitting away placidly as she was telling the story. In fact, it is this extraordinary calmness everywhere in the face of all their difficulties which I really find the most striking thing about the Finnish people.

Then I went to see some houses which had really suffered direct hits. These were small two-storied buildings built of wood and stone. There was no question of anyone still living there; all the wooden parts of the houses were completely gutted by fire. One house in particular had received a direct hit, and all that was left was one wall with a bit of a staircase still clinging to it; the rest was just a pile of broken masonry.

We got hold of an old man who used to live in this house and he told me of the miraculous escape he had had. He and his wife and sister had managed to get down to the cellar just before the whole building came tumbling about their ears. Two other people in the house had been killed as they were running down the stairs, but these three in the cellar were absolutely unhurt except for a few bruises caused by bricks falling from the cellar roof. They waited down there some time while the Russian planes power-dived over the houses and spattered them with machine-gun bullets.

Well, these are two positive cases of bombs falling on workers' houses in Helsinki, and there are many more, though the story in each case would be just the same. What the Russian press and wireless mean by such extraordinary statements I do not know, particularly as they are so contradictory, for it was only the other day that we were threatened in Helsinki with a real lesson from the air! However, that is the Russians' affair, I suppose. The reports obviously do not cut

any ice here, and one would imagine that they were intended entirely for home consumption, if it were not for the fact that some of the wireless reports were given out in Finnish.

We had an air-raïd alarm this afternoon, by the way. As far as I have heard so far, no bombs were dropped, but one could hear the planes going over very high up, and anti-aircraft fire could be heard outside the city.

*In retrospect, LONDON*

THERE did not seem to be very much more I could do from Helsinki at this time, so I began agitating for permission to go up to Lapland. A big party, mostly of Swedish journalists, was arranged—chiefly to go and see the Swedish volunteers. I was not included in this party, nor was a Swedish journalist friend of mine. We protested energetically, and finally the Press authorities agreed to let us go north the next day. We had police passes made out for Rovaniemi—the capital of Lapland.

This was a much more comfortable journey than the one to Viipuri, for we had sleepers on the train. But we sat up half the night talking to a Finnish soldier who was going on leave for the first time since the war had begun. He said it would be the first time he had slept between sheets for over six weeks, though it was a long time before he actually got to bed. He had an English wife and himself spoke English fluently, if ungrammatically, with a trace of North Country accent. And he was so pleased to be talking English again that nothing would stop him.

The next morning there was a restaurant car on the train! Thus we could breakfast in peace without having to fight



*exclusive News Agency*

A BLOCK OF FLATS IN HELSINKI AFTER AN AIR RAID

my Swedish friend found that two Swedes were leaving that night, and we were lucky enough to get their rooms. We gave the Swedish officer and the chauffeur dinner, and when they had finished they drove straight back to Kemi. How they did it I can't imagine. Nothing on earth would have persuaded me to make that appalling trip again the same night.

One of the first people I met in Rovaniemi was Geoffrey Cox, of the *Daily Express*, who had been there since the beginning of the war. Four of us planned a trip to Petsamo in a couple of days' time. But the next day the party of journalists who had left Helsinki the day before I did now appeared on the scene, and there were the usual complications. In the end, our party of four was increased to about a dozen.

It turned out to be a terrific trip. We drove in a bus over six hundred miles in just over twenty-four hours, and the bus driver was a living miracle. It was a big bus, designed to hold about twenty-five passengers, and on those frozen roads he sometimes approached seventy miles an hour. I stopped being terrified when I realised how completely he was in control. He skidded round corners, accelerated at just the right moment to pull out of the skid, and kept going hour after hour with hardly any sleep at all.

Such little sleep as was possible we snatched in the police station in Ivalo, dosing down on bunks which had rolls of reindeer skins for mattresses. One of the Swedes disturbed even this brief interlude by snoring. Someone woke him up, and he was so aggrieved that he went out of doors and stayed there in the bitter cold for the rest of the night. He was still mortally offended when we stopped for breakfast the next morning, and stayed in the bus, refusing to eat anything.

On the way home we stopped to watch the Lapps rounding up and marking their reindeer. I was so sleepy



by this time that I could not take very much interest, and we finally got back to Rovaniemi about lunch time.

I had my first Finnish bath in Rovaniemi—the institution they call the *sauna*. This was quite a primitive one, such as may be found at every farmhouse all over the country. You undress and go into a small room lined with wood, with a large stove in the corner and wide shelves on the walls. You lie down on one of the shelves, and an old woman comes in and throws water on the fire, causing a cloud of steam to come billowing out of a hole at the top of the stove. She goes on throwing water into the stove until it gets about as hot as you can bear it, and then she leaves you to relax. In every *sauna* you will see buckets of water with sheaves of birch twigs in them. After you have lain down for a while you take one of these sheaves and whip yourself as hard as you can with it. If there are several of you—and there almost certainly are, because the *sauna* is essentially a social affair—you lambaste each other. This is supposed to get the circulation going and make you sweat. I found myself sweating quite adequately without any of this; but it's a lot of fun and part of the ritual.

When at last you can't stand the heat any longer you go into another room where an extremely unattractive old crone scrubs you mercilessly all over with a loofah. Finally you are at liberty to go outside and roll in the snow, but personally I found a bucket of cold water sufficient. This, of course, is the country *sauna*. In Helsinki they have the most wonderful place, where there is no question of rolling in the snow. There is every variety of shower and spray to have afterwards, and a most luxurious swimming pool.

I liked the *sauna* so much, and it made one feel so well, that I had them regularly from then on.

ROVANIEMI, *January 22nd, 1940*

T O-DAY I am talking from Rovaniemi, the little town almost on the Arctic Circle, which in peace time is one of the great tourist resorts of Finland. I made the last stage of my journey from Helsinki in one of the large fleet of cars belonging to the Swedish Volunteer Corps in Finland. But that was the last part of an extraordinary piece of good luck which I had on my trip north.

My travelling companion was a Swedish journalist who also, as it happens, flew over with me from Stockholm to Turku when I first arrived in this country over a fortnight ago. Another big party of journalists had left Helsinki the day before us to see the Swedish volunteers. We got talking to a Danish cameraman on the train, and he said: 'If you really want to see the Swedes you'd better get off the train at——' Well, of course I can't tell you the name of the place. It was getting pretty dark by the time we reached there, but anyway we got off the train and found our way to the only hotel.

When we arrived we found it absolutely full of Swedish officers and, by the greatest piece of good luck, my Swedish friend found an officer he'd been at school with. This completely changed the complexion of things. The first thing

this Swedish officer fixed was an interview with the colonel. We went along to his room at the hotel—which in point of fact has ceased to be a hotel at all and is the officers' mess and quarters. After introductions and so on, the colonel got down to talking. The first thing he said rather summed up the whole status of the Swedish Volunteer Corps in Finland.

'Get it out of your heads right away,' he declared, speaking excellent English, 'that we are a lot of adventurers. This corps has, of course, attracted a lot of the most adventurous types in Sweden, but what is far more important, it has attracted our idealists. We are a group of ordinary Swedes who, after hard thinking, have come here hoping to help Finland, and in so doing to help our own country as well. And you must not be astonished,' he went on, 'when I tell you that we've got here, side by side now, men who fought against each other in the Spanish war.'

He also told me that one of his lieutenants had seen active service with the French Foreign Legion; others had fought in Abyssinia, and some of the older men had been in the Finnish War of Independence of 1918. These men come from every social class—some of the oldest families in Sweden are represented—and nearly all of them have given up good jobs to join the corps. Their ages range from men of fifty-five to boys of nineteen. Some of them—but only a very small proportion—have no particular military knowledge, and they are here to look after transport, etc. Others did their military service a good many years ago and are a bit rusty, but the great majority are young men of around twenty-five who have only recently completed their military service, and it won't take very long to turn them

into first-class soldiers. In any case, they are all going through the intensive and specialised form of training which this war in Finland demands.

I am pretty sure that I am the first British journalist to see this little town, where the Swedish Volunteer Corps is undergoing its training. I am quite sure that I am the only one who has dined with the Swedish officers in their mess and heard what they really think about it all. And the most impressive thing of all to me is their extreme modesty. As we were sitting over our coffee and Swedish punch after dinner, one of these officers said:

‘For heaven’s sake don’t go and talk a whole lot about honour and glory like some of our own newspaper people have done. It’s easy enough to think *that* way when you’re sitting in a comfortable warm room drinking a good glass of punch, but we’ve done nothing yet—absolutely nothing. You can reserve the heroics until we’ve done anything approaching what the Finns have done. We are here to train ourselves up to a standard of efficiency which it’s going to be very hard to reach.’

I think I can say that that is the whole sentiment which you would find all through this corps.

Early next morning while it was still half dark—this little town doesn’t get much daylight at this time of year—we went out to have a look around the camp. Everywhere was a scene of tremendous activity. The white army, as the local people call them because of their white sheepskin coats, were going about their various duties. One detachment was going off for hand-grenade practice; others for training with the super-efficient automatic rifles with which they are equipped; their whole equipment, clothes, arms and everything is superlatively good. Others were going

off for ski-ing practice, because this, of course, is one of the most important aspects of the Finnish war.

I can't tell you anything about the actual number of men in this camp, but they have already built themselves a regular village of wooden huts which they have brought with them from Sweden. These are sectional buildings of, I should think, thirty odd feet long by about twenty wide. Each hut can be carried on two lorries and takes a trained gang about two or three hours to put up. This, incidentally, is a very important part of their training because they will use these huts as rest houses just behind the lines, and they've got to learn to be as quick as possible in assembling and dismantling them. I went inside a number of these huts. Each of them can take up to thirty men. They are spotlessly clean and, for me, almost too warm, being heated by a typical army-hut stove which burns wood. They haven't got enough of these huts yet to house the whole corps, but the Finnish authorities have put other buildings in the town at their disposal for the time being.

And now before I stop I must put in a word about the Finnish *lottas* of which you've heard so much. Every day streams of Swedish volunteers are arriving at all hours of the day and night, and no matter what time a man arrives he will find a hot meal waiting for him. Sleep and hours off seem to mean nothing to these women, but they are at least rewarded by the everlasting gratitude of the volunteer corps.

ROVANIEMI, *January 25th, 1940*

I RETURNED to-day from a lightning trip to the Petsamo front, having covered about six hundred miles in just over a day. I had originally intended to go with Geoffrey Cox of the *Daily Express* and two other journalists in a car, but these things get about, and before we knew where we were there were a lot of other people clamouring to go, and so, in the end, we all went in a large and extremely comfortable bus. We started yesterday at the unearthly hour of 3 a.m. because we wanted to do as much as we could before day broke, the Arctic Highway to Petsamo being rather liable to be unhealthy during the daytime. About 6 a.m. we stopped and found a very good breakfast awaiting us in a little village inn where they had had an air-raid alarm only a few hours earlier, and then we went on to a place called Ivalo, about 180 miles from Rovaniemi. There we had to wait until dusk, but there was plenty to see because the Russians had dropped about three hundred bombs there the day before. The prodigality of the bombing is an extraordinary thing about this war, because nothing of any importance was hit in this place, and in another village which I saw later they had dropped no less than six hundred and eighty bombs in one day

and hit only one small wooden cabin. There was only one real house in the place to hit anyway.

In Ivalo I met a Finnish officer who had been an engineer in the Petsamo nickel mines, and he told me that the Russians would be most unlikely to get any benefit from these mines because the preliminary work on them is not yet finished and the plans and drawings were rushed over to England the moment the war started. We made our lunch off reindeer steaks, and as it began to get dark soon afterwards we started off for the front line.

I was very glad to get a chance to see this front because, although there has been very little activity for about a month, it is really a little war all on its own. And it seems incredible that warfare at all, let alone mechanised warfare, can take place in mid-winter right up in the Arctic above the sixty-ninth parallel—farther north than Murmansk, in fact. Well, to get on with things, we drove at the usual incredible speed through snow-covered forest which was unending except for occasional stretches of desolate tundra—great tracks of frozen swampland with hardly any trees—until after some time we began to see traces of the Finnish defences. Once again, as at the Karelian Isthmus, they have made full use of their country's natural resources; one sees the same tracts of trees felled about three feet from the ground. And then suddenly the bus turned sharply off the main road and we found ourselves pulled up outside a group of log houses.

This was the local headquarters and we were received there by several Finnish officers. The place had been machine-gunned from the air only a few days before and you could see where the bullets had torn through the wooden walls. Some of these officers spoke good English

and several of them had been through the Petsamo campaign right from the start when the Russians broke through on November the 29th to commence the first fighting in the Finnish war. They had many stories to tell of the rear-guard action which the Finns had fought in their retreat. Stories such as the one when, having no anti-tank guns, they scored a direct hit on a Russian tank at six hundred yards with a field gun. And they particularly enjoyed telling of the booby-traps which they had left behind them. At one place there had been a *sauna*—the steam bath which I have already described. They left this place mined and when the Russians arrived and went to have a bath the mines began to go off. There was a gravel pit nearby and they took cover in it, but the Finns had foreseen this move and this too was mined.

As I say, nothing spectacular has happened on this front for about a month. The Russians retired a few kilometres from the farthest point south which they reached, and they have settled themselves down there, but they are given very little peace by the Finnish ski-patrols which are constantly frustrating their attempts to build anything at all permanent in the way of barracks or fortifications. The Russians, not knowing the country, keep very near the Arctic Highway and their lines stretch a few kilometres on either side of it; between their lines and the Finnish lines, which are about the same length, is a no-man's-land of an average width of four miles. That is where this front differs from the others in which the two lines are quite close together. And it is in this no-man's-land that Russian and Finnish ski patrols are constantly meeting each other as they glide silently through the forest in their white clothes. The Russians are using tanks a good deal here and they have



lost a good many through mines, but I was told that they have invented a machine consisting of a kind of roller which is pushed in front of the tank and which explodes any mine in its path. The Finns were rather vague about how it worked, but I gathered it was something of this sort.

After talking for a while at Headquarters, we went up to within a very short distance of the front line. Then we got out of the car and walked along the main road until we came to a barrier. This marked the actual front line. We went round the barrier and down a little hill out into no-man's-land.

It was the most beautiful night I think I've ever seen. The temperature was about 25° below zero Fahrenheit but the air was so electrically dry that you didn't seem to feel it. The enormous, brilliant, Arctic full moon so lit up the whole countryside that it was practically daylight. The trees had been cleared for about five hundred yards, but beyond stretched the thick forest. Not a sound could be heard, and a more utterly peaceful scene could scarcely be imagined. And then, suddenly, I heard a swish behind me and discovered a large ski-patrol gliding almost silently towards the Russian lines, some of them carrying rifles and others sub-machine-guns.

And so the feeling of war returned, and even more so when I got back to the line and found that the innocent looking bank down which I had climbed was punctuated every so often by cleverly concealed machine-gun nests, which between them covered the whole front.

Then we went to see some of the tents where the Finnish soldiers rest behind the lines. I said before that tents didn't sound the ideal place to live in even in south Finland on the Karelian Isthmus, and as for two hundred and fifty

miles or so inside the Arctic Circle, the idea seems almost impossible. But the fact remains that they are extremely warm and cosy and you couldn't wish for a better place even though it may be 25° below zero outside. Twenty officers and men share one of these tents, and the more I see of Finnish soldiers the more impressed I become. We sat around talking for a while until their supper arrived in a field-kitchen, brought up by one of the ubiquitous *lottas* on a sledge. And so we left them to have their meal, listen to the wireless, and enjoy their well-earned rest.

We drove back to Ivalo and had a few hours' sleep in the local police barracks before starting back, once again at 3 a.m., for Rovaniemi. On our way we stopped to see the Lapps rounding up and marking their reindeer; but that is a story which I shall tell some other time.

*In retrospect, LONDON*

ROVANIEMI didn't boast a broadcasting station, but the Finns sent technicians along and fixed me up with a microphone in the hotel office. I'm sorry to say I know nothing about the technical side of broadcasting, so I could only hope for the best. The microphone was a bit high, and I had to sit on the table. I had to begin my first broadcast all over again because the telephone started to ring about half way through. Another minor drawback was the fact that it was impossible to shut the door because of the microphone lead; but they persuaded everyone to keep quiet while I was talking, and things went quite well. In fact, I think the quality of the broadcasts from Rovaniemi was as good as from the studio in Helsinki. I never knew

for certain at the time whether London was receiving my talks. In order to find out if they were using anything I had sent, I had to listen to the nine o'clock news, which got through to Finland fairly well at 11 o'clock.

After the Petsamo trip, which I took a day or two to recover from, we arranged what turned out to be the best long trip I made in Finland. It began with Walter Kerr of the *New York Herald Tribune*, a Dane named Ebbe Munck and myself. Then Virginia Cowles of the *Sunday Times* and Harold Denny of the *New York Times* turned up and joined us, and later we were joined by Desmond Tighe of Reuters. We had the best Press officer in Finland with us. His name was Hugo Makinen, and he was one of the very few who understood what newspaper correspondents wanted.

We left Rovaniemi by train in the early hours of the morning, and Desmond Tighe joined us at Kemi, where I had seen the Swedish Volunteers a few days before. We were making for Kajaani, the headquarters of the North Central front command. We missed our connection by a few minutes at Oulu, and after a lot of trouble managed to hire two cars.

It was a long drive to Kajaani, and as usual we spent a good deal of the time in the ditch. Those Finnish ditches are very deep, no doubt in order to drain away the melted snow in the spring; and in winter they are a menace. They are full of snow and it is very hard to see where the road ends and the ditch begins, particularly at night. Sooner or later you are bound to go into them. Every car carries a shovel to dig away the snow when this happens, and we cut branches off the fir trees to stick under the wheels to give them some sort of grip. But getting clear was some-

times a protracted business, and the journey seemed to have taken a long time when at last we arrived at the rather primitive little hotel at Kajaani.

The next morning we were taken to see a big paper mill which, although interesting, was not quite what we had come for. And in the evening we all went to pay our respects to General Toompo, who directed operations on this front. His headquarters was in a big house, and in the billiard room, with the table covered with maps, he gave us an outline of the fighting on his front since the beginning of the war. At dinner we told him that the thing we most wanted to do was to cross the Russian frontier. This would not only make a good story in itself but we persuaded him that it would make the finest possible Finnish propaganda. He promised to do what he could.

I doubt if the staff of the little hotel had ever seen such a strange collection of lunatics as we must have appeared to them. We sat up all night writing stories. We talked on the telephone to America and Holland and Denmark. We couldn't speak a word of their language, and can't possibly have made sense to them at all.

The following day we left at 4 a.m. to go to Suomussalmi—and cross the Russian frontier. My next broadcasts tell of what we saw on this day; but they do not tell the story I heard from a Finnish officer up near the front. He said that just after the second battle of Suomussalmi one of his men came into the tent reporting that two Russian soldiers had been captured. The officer told him to bring them in for questioning. But they were in no condition to talk. Their hands and feet were completely frozen, and they could not see. After a while the Russians became aware

of the heat from the red-hot stove and stumbled towards it. Then they both put their hands flat on the red-hot iron. They kept them there. They couldn't feel a thing. And there they stayed with their hands sizzling like rashers of bacon frying. The Finnish officer said the horror of this was so intense that for a little time he couldn't do anything. Then he pulled himself together and told his men to drag them away. I asked him what happened to the poor devils. 'Oh,' he said, 'we had to shoot them. It was the most merciful thing to do. They would have died anyway.'

We saw and heard a lot of terrible things that day.

OULU, *February 1st, 1940*

FOR the last couple of days I have been in the town which is the headquarters of the Central Northern front. We all dined with the General on Tuesday night, and there we heard of the big battle which started on Monday at Rasti, in the Kuhmo sector, a good way south of Suomussalmi. This is the only part of this front where the Russians are still in Finland, and this battle may well turn out to be one of the most important of the war, as a whole Russian division—the 54th—is involved.

Naturally, everyone wanted a chance to go down to this part of the front, but things are still in a very early stage, and the General couldn't give us permission yet. So, by way of an alternative, I asked him if it would be possible to get across the frontier into Russia. No doubt the pine trees in Russia look very much the same as in Finland, but I thought it would make a very interesting trip, and somehow I rather liked the idea of getting into the U.S.S.R. without going through the formality of getting a visa for my passport. He said he'd see what could be done about it, and the upshot of it all was that we all started for Suomussalmi at four o'clock yesterday morning.

The trip itself is a story—and a very grim story—which

I'd like to tell all on its own another time, so I'll skip it meantime and get on to our arrival at a Finnish reserve position some little distance behind the front line. This was the usual little cluster of tents built round the fir trees, only most of *these* tents were not made of canvas but of a kind of beaver board. The lower part of the trunk of a growing fir tree is stripped of branches and acts as the tent pole, and then an octagonal framework of wood is built round this and the spaces filled in with beaver boards. There is a stove inside, of course, and the chimney is arranged so that the smoke curls up the trunk of the tree. The headquarters of this position was built more in the nature of a shelter, dug fairly deep into the earth, with the roof made of logs covered over by earth. And here we met the captain in command. He was in particularly good spirits because his wife had come down to see him there—almost in the front line—for a couple of days. We were talking to the captain about one thing and another when suddenly I heard the noise of aeroplanes flying low overhead. And when you hear an aeroplane in Finland it's a fairly safe bet, unfortunately, that it's a Russian one. Anyway, I ran up the steps of the shelter to have a look and just caught sight of one of the machines as it passed. I wasn't allowed to look for very long before being told fairly forcibly to get back in the shelter. This wasn't so much for my own sake as for the fact that they didn't want the plane to see any movement on the ground. Now this plane was only a very few hundred feet up and, though it's obvious from the ground that these Finnish positions in the woods are wonderfully well camouflaged, it certainly goes to prove that they must be absolutely invisible from the air.

After the aeroplane had passed harmlessly by we were all taken to one of these beaver board tents and given a most excellent lunch, which ended up with whisky and cigars. Not so bad for just behind the front line! And then we went on to the front line itself. Here the position was more or less the same as before, and dotted about among the tents and shelters were a lot of kennels for the kind of Alsatian dogs which the Finnish ski-patrols use to send back messages. Outside the captain's tent was a machine-gun mounted on a stand. He explained that it had come out of a Russian tank and that he amused himself almost every day taking shots at Russian aeroplanes. But he added regretfully that he hadn't registered a hit yet.

Then off we went to get across the border into Russia; but not, I thought at the time, with great hopes of success. We made a very roundabout detour, climbing over and jumping trenches all the way until I lost all sense of direction. And then the officer who was our guide pointed to a lake through the trees and said :

'Do you see that lake there? The Russians are just the other side, about 250 yards away from us. If you want to get into Russia you'll have to walk across the lake, and I may as well tell you that they've got machine-guns among the trees.'

Well, put like that it didn't sound a very attractive proposition. And we were thinking rather half-heartedly about it, when suddenly a Finnish battery behind us started to fire. Several shells whined high overhead, and then the Russian batteries began to answer and one could hear the shells bursting a long way back. I thought, well, I wanted to see some action and here, certainly, are shells popping over my head. A long way off, admittedly, but shells





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FINNISH SHARPSHOOTERS NEAR SUOMUSSALMI

nevertheless—and then suddenly a Russian shell burst rather uncomfortably near. So we ran forward to an observation post, which was a shallow pit, and took cover.

The next thing was a series of sharp explosions about forty yards behind us. This was the Russians welcoming us with trench mortars and rifle grenades. Things were beginning to get a little hot. And then a regular artillery duel began right over our heads. Finnish shells screamed thirty or forty feet over us making that awful whistling noise which sounds rather like this . . . . . and pitched on to the ice of the lake rather too far out to the left, about three hundred yards away, sending up great fountains of snow and ice. They looked more like naval shells. I saw the artillery observer pick up the field telephone and correct the aim, with the result that the next lot fell into the woods and may have hit their mark.

Meanwhile, the Russian shells were whistling back right over our heads and bursting seventy or eighty yards behind. And though I may have said uncomplimentary things about the Russian artillery in the past, I could have wished for a good deal less accuracy than they were showing then, because they were grouping uncomfortably well and it was only a question of shortening their range a little for things to become really unpleasant. After about twenty minutes or so of this, it quietened down a bit, and they told us that we'd better move back quietly, in pairs.

I was one of the last pair to leave, and just before we actually started the Russians sent over a parting volley of a couple of shells which were the nearest of the lot ; they burst between forty and fifty yards away from us. After that we got rather gingerly out of the observation post and made our way back to the front line headquarters.

Here we had a very welcome cup of coffee and while we were enjoying it a man from a ski-patrol—a magnificent looking fellow who had been a farmer—reported that he'd been on a patrol some miles behind the Russian lines, and that things were quite satisfactory in that particular sector. And then the news came in by field telephone that a large Russian patrol of about two hundred men had crossed into Finland farther down the line. We saw that this was going to keep the captain busy, and so we said good-bye; he hoped he'd see us again and that next time he'd be able to say he'd brought down a Russian aeroplane with his machine-gun!

On the way home I mused that if I hadn't actually succeeded in getting into Russia, Russia had certainly succeeded in coming uncomfortably close to me.

OULU, *February 1st, 1940*

THE story I'm going to tell to-day is an old one; that is to say, it happened about three weeks ago. It's the story of the second battle of Suomussalmi, when the Finns completely destroyed the entire Russian 44th division. I saw this battlefield on Wednesday, or rather, when I say battle-field, I should say battle-road, because this story is mainly concerned with about four miles of road which I shall never forget. Most of you have probably read about the battle and seen pictures of the miles on miles of war-spoils which the Finns captured. So had I, of course, but it wasn't until I saw it all for myself that I got anything like a real picture of it; and I'm hoping to be able to give you something of this picture while at the same time sparing you some of the terrible details which help to make it complete. And let me tell you at this point that if you have thought that the figures of the war spoils published by the Press have been exaggerated, I can assure you they have not.

This battle, I think, will go down in history as one of the most brilliant and decisive defeats which has ever been inflicted upon an enemy vastly superior in numbers. The first battle of Suomussalmi was in its second day on Boxing Day when the Finns were engaging the 163rd division in

two parts on Lake Kianta. Then the news came through that the Russians were sending their crack 44th division to reinforce the 163rd. This was one of the most critical periods of the whole war. The 44th division got to within under four miles of the 163rd, and the fact that they never got any nearer was due to some masterly fighting by a comparatively tiny Finnish force, which was all that could be spared from the main battle, in which the Russians were given no peace day or night. The moment the battle with the 163rd division finished, the Finns turned straight round and with troops which had had scarcely any rest for a week, attacked the fresh and well-armed 44th division on New Year's Day. The Russian column was concentrated for several miles along the road leading from the Russian frontier to the village of Suomussalmi. The Finns deployed their troops and attacked this column at both ends simultaneously, while also harassing it continually from the flanks, with ski detachments, through the forest. And just one week later, on January 7th, this entire Russian division had been annihilated. The casualties were enormous; fifteen hundred prisoners were taken, a vast quantity of war material—virtually the entire equipment of the division—and the number of poor half-frozen Russian soldiers who may have succeeded in stumbling back through the forest to their own country must be negligible.

I had started from the town which is the headquarters of the Central Northern front at four a.m., and we were going to see a sector of this front and pass through the Suomussalmi battle area on the way. As we drove through the night we passed regular caravans of lorries which are still carrying or dragging back the spoils of this battle. It was light by the time we got to Lake Kianta, where the battle really began,



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ABANDONED RUSSIAN EQUIPMENT AT SUOMUSSALMI

when the Russians sent 700 men across the ice, only to be mown down by Finnish machine-gun fire. We crossed the lake on the ice—in summer time there is a ferry—and then began to enter what is now called the Valley of Death.

Realisation came to one only by degrees at first, with the sight of an occasional disabled armoured-car or a field-kitchen. Here and there was a dead horse; and then we came to the beginning of those four miles where the main Russian supply and artillery column had been cut off. Never, I should think, has there been such a scene of frozen horror since the retreat of Napoleon's grand army from Moscow, and even that can't anywhere have been so concentrated. A lot of it had already been cleaned up. Some of the best of the war material, the less damaged tanks and artillery, had been taken away; a great many of the frozen bodies had been buried, but there are hundreds and hundreds still there, frozen as hard as iron, in the ghastly, fantastic attitudes in which they fell. There is an appalling unreality about these bodies; you don't expect bodies could ever look like that. They just don't look human. The terrific cold has made them appear like rather badly executed waxworks. And they are everywhere. On the sides of the road; under the trees; in the temporary shelters and dugouts where they had tried to escape the relentless fury of the Finnish ski-patrols. And all along both sides of the road, for all these four miles, are lorries, field-kitchens, staff-cars, ammunition carts, limbers and every other kind of vehicle you can imagine. How on earth there was room for anything more there it is hard to realise; but of course there was far more. For one thing, I didn't see a single piece of artillery. The Finns had taken away all that.

The only tanks which remained were too badly damaged

to be of any real use. I saw an amphibian tank there which certainly is not buoyant any more. It didn't look as though it ever was, and anyway the reason for bringing a tank, designed to be propelled through water, into a country where everything is frozen hard, seems a bit obscure. Heaps of broken small arms—all the good rifles, five thousand of them, have been taken away—battered steel helmets, gasmasks, bayonets, water bottles, bits of harness, pouches, bandoliers and the hundred-and-one things which go to equip a soldier—just great heaps of all these things had been piled here and there alongside the road. Everything useful had been taken away for use by the Finnish army. But there were Finnish soldiers still raking about among the debris to see if anything valuable had been missed. And over everything was scattered paper: books, pamphlets, school copybooks, atlases, account books, even music scores. It looked as though it had rained paper. But I've heard that battlefields always have paper scattered all over them, so perhaps this aspect of Suomussalmi is not abnormal, though I can hardly believe that any troops have ever carried so much paper about with them as these Russians did.

Well, as I say, this dreadful scene of desolation went on and on for just over four miles. What accentuated the horror of it all was that the road runs through the most lovely country imaginable. The day I was there the sun was shining in a cloudless sky, and if you kept your eyes above a certain level you saw nothing but a magnificent avenue of tall snow-cloaked pine trees glistening in the sun. And below that level—what I have just tried to describe: mile upon mile of wreckage. A staggering example of part of what it has already cost the Soviet Union for their attack upon a peace-loving neighbour country.



OULU, *February 1st, 1940*

WHEN I got back from Suomussalmi on Wednesday night, Harold Denny of the *New York Times* told me some interesting things he had heard from Russian prisoners who had just come in. As he put it, these were not the usual shop-worn prisoners who have been milked dry of information by Finnish intelligence officers, and whose stories have become so pat as to be scarcely worth telling, but real fresh ones, wrapped in cellophane!, untouched by human hands and still jittery from the experiences they had just gone through, and anxious as to what was going to happen to them.

There were three of these men. Two consisted of the observer, with the rank of captain, and the machine-gunner and wireless operator, who was a sergeant, who were both part of the same crew of a bombing-plane which had been shot down only a few hours before—ironically enough with a four-barrelled anti-aircraft machine-gun which had recently been captured from the Russians. The pilot had made a forced landing on a frozen lake and had tried to escape into the forest. The observer and machine-gunner surrendered at once.

They weren't inclined to talk at first, for the shadow of

the *Gay Pay Oo* (Russian Secret Police) hangs over them even after they have been captured; and they are terrified that reprisals will be taken against their families if it becomes known that they have talked indiscreetly. But when Denny had assured them repeatedly that neither their names nor home towns nor, in fact, anything which could possibly implicate them would be mentioned, they agreed to talk.

Denny has been *New York Times* correspondent in Moscow for a number of years, so he knows Russia and the Russians pretty well. He said that the captain gave him the impression of being an honest man. He was a member of the Communist party and his conversation, as is often the case with such Russians, was a curious blend of realistic, unpalatable fact and familiar parrot-like phrases from party propaganda. So at one minute he was saying that the Soviet people lived in a straight-jacket and that their bodies and minds were enslaved, and the next that Russia was a democracy and the people could elect their own leaders. He said there was no real dissatisfaction in the air-force, but he didn't know anything about the army. Both the captain and the machine-gunner came from an aerodrome behind the eastern frontier and had not been engaged in bombing towns in southern Finland.

Their objectives, the captain said, were ordinarily military objectives, such as roads, bridges, railway stations and so on in the evacuated towns in the war zone along the eastern front. But about a week ago, he added, he was ordered to bomb a certain town outside the war zone. He criticised the order to his commanding officer, complaining that it would mean bombing civilians; the result was that his plane was taken away from him and he was kept on the

ground for five days to think things over. The next job he was given was a military objective, and he at once took it on, which turned out to be his last flight. He said he would have objected again if he had been ordered to bomb an open town, and that the result would certainly have been the same as in any army when you disobey orders.

Both the captain and the machine-gunner expressed themselves amazed and horrified when Denny told them that civilian houses had been bombed wholesale and the people living there killed, and also that hospitals had been bombed. He spoke to them separately and these are the kind of replies that he got: From the captain: 'It's absolutely wrong, it's barbarous to bomb civilians.' From the sergeant: 'Such bombings are criminal, evil, the work of murderers.'

The sergeant had been a Consomol—a young Communist—but he'd been expelled for lack of zeal. He said there had been a lot of discussions about the bombing of civilians in his mess—when the political commissar was absent—and added that mechanics, machine-gunners and people like himself were absolutely against the bombing of civilians, but if they went and talked to their officers on such lines they'd be shot. And so nobody dare say anything. They had all, of course, heard of civilian bombing and knew from the nature of certain raids that civilians must be suffering. And they didn't believe the papers which said that only military objectives were being bombed. They got to talking about it among themselves and agreed it was a terrible thing, but what could a few non-commissioned officers do about it? Of course, if several squadrons refused to bomb open towns it might have some

effect, but that would take a lot of careful and dangerous preparation.

The captain and the sergeant rather contradicted each other as to Russian sentiment at the beginning of the war. The captain said there was great enthusiasm because the people had thought it was going to be another march into Poland. But now they were disillusioned. The soldiers were cold, hungry and facing totally unexpected dangers, and now they only wanted to get out of it. But all the same he could see no chance of the army collapsing. The soldiers were like slaves, they must do as they are told even if it meant certain death.

The sergeant, on the other hand, insisted that there had never been any enthusiasm at all for the war. Party officials had made speeches saying that it was necessary, and told the people to cheer for it. And, as the sergeant said: 'In Russia, if you're told to cheer, you cheer—if you know what's good for you.'

At least, all this goes to prove that some of the Soviet aviators flying over Finland disapprove of bombing open towns, and it also looks as though enthusiasm for the war among the army has rather fizzled out, if ever it existed. But in spite of this I think there is little reason to expect the war to be ended by a mutiny among the troops, as happened in the Russian Army in 1918.

*In retrospect, LONDON*

WHEN we got back to Oulu, I thought I should never be able to broadcast my Suomussalmi talks. I had such a cold and cough that I could hardly speak, and I knew I

must talk for at least twenty minutes at a stretch. I wrote the script of the 'Valley of Death' talk on the train between Kajaani and Oulu, feeling something like one of those frozen Russian corpses myself. Curiously enough it turned out to be one of the best I wrote, from what I heard later. I honestly hardly knew what I was writing at the time.

I also wrote up Harold Denny's Russian prisoner-story when I got to Oulu, to make up good measure, because I felt I hadn't broadcast anything for so long. And finally I went down to the Broadcasting Station with three talks, not knowing in the least if my voice was going to last out. Somehow or other it did, although it must have sounded pretty wheezy; then I went back to the hotel and to bed.

The next day we were to see the biggest Russian prisoners' camp in Finland, at a place called Pelso. We went in two cars, and it was not long before the leading one broke down. Neither of the drivers seemed to know anything about the insides of their cars. The self-starter of this car wasn't working, and there was no starting handle, so we all got out to push. Then it occurred to one of us that we might get the other car to push, thereby saving a lot of trouble. But the Finns are a stubborn race, and it was a long time before they would agree to this obviously sensible suggestion. However, finally they gave in and we shoved that car for about a mile without getting the engine to start. Then we stopped, and while we were waiting a horse-drawn sledge approached. This gave the driver an idea and he got out and had a long conversation with the driver of the sledge. We saw the horse unharnessed and hitched to the car. With great efforts it contrived to pull it very slowly up the hill where we had stopped. The car, needless to say did not start. Why anyone should have supposed

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that one horse could succeed where thirty horse-power had failed was never explained.

Finally, one of the journalists got the thing to start, and we moved on. After reaching some of the most desolate country I have ever seen we saw a big gang of Russian prisoners marching along the road on their way back to camp after the day's work. They were all dressed in their uniforms, and most of them were wearing the cloth caps with earflaps and a little point on the top which have such an oddly sinister appearance.

The camp was surrounded by a high, double barbed-wire fence. We were taken to the warden's office, and after giving us coffee and bread, he took us to see the prisoners. The various interviews, some of which I described in my next broadcasts, took so long that we hadn't finished until nearly nine o'clock.

Then we began the drive back, which was the coldest I ever remember. About half way—and fortunately near a railway station—the same car broke down again. This time nothing seemed to do it any good. It was now about midnight, so having discovered that a train left in about an hour we all went to a nearby café. We got them to light the stove and give us coffee, and we gradually thawed out until it was time to go to the station. The train was full of troops as usual, including a lot of wounded. There was one cheerful looking soldier sitting opposite me still wearing his white cape. He pointed to a bandaged leg and said: 'Molotov!' Then he took a purse out of his pocket and displayed three of the red enamel hammer and sickle badges which the Russian officers wore as cap badges—just to show he hadn't been hit for nothing. I'd have given anything to be able to speak Finnish. Men like this

must have had wonderful stories to tell, and it was exasperating not to be able to hear them.

We got to Oulu in a state of exhaustion at three in the morning. I wrote my stories and gave the broadcasts the next day, and then we all wanted to go back to Rovaniemi. We learned, however, that there had been two very bad air-raids there, and that the hotel was evacuated and no one could return. Nevertheless, Ebbe Munck and Walter Kerr persuaded the Press officer to take them there, but the rest of us were obliged to remain and await instructions the next day. We were furious, but it turned out well in the end, for that evening Virginia Cowles and I went round to the Finnish Club, which we had discovered, and got some first-rate stories from some ski-patrol men. The next morning Makinen rang up from Rovaniemi to say that we could all return, and that a trip to Petsamo had been arranged for three of us. I had been there before, so I said I'd stand down in favour of Virginia Cowles, Harold Denny and Desmond Tighe.



## II

OULU, *February 3rd, 1940*

Two days ago I told you something about the second battle, and the battlefield, of Suomussalmi. And now I am able to give you the first full story from the other side, told by a Russian officer who went right through the battle himself with the 44th division.

He was at one of the biggest prisoner-of-war camps in Finland, which I went to see yesterday. First, we were shown a room full of slightly wounded soldiers—frostbite was the chief trouble—and then another room full of N.C.O.'s. These were mostly Ukrainian peasants, ugly, dark little fellows who looked pretty silly compared with Finnish soldiers. They had been called up on September the 7th, most of them had been to Poland and many of them had later been drafted to the 44th division. They had been taken prisoner at Suomussalmi.

It is a hopeless business seeing Russian prisoners collectively. From long force of habit they leave all the talking to one spokesman, who almost invariably tells you just what he thinks you would like to hear. And so you get nowhere. Well, this place was no exception. And it was not until we went to the Warden's office and saw this Russian officer by himself that we heard the story I'm going to tell.

As soon as he came into the room I thought to myself: Ah, here's something different. He was the first Russian officer I've seen who *looked* like an officer. He said he'd been a professional soldier for a number of years, and he looked it. I wish I could tell you more about the man himself and his career, because it's a very interesting story, but for obvious reasons I cannot. And the prison warden with whom he's made friends begged us to say nothing which could possibly incriminate him in his own country, which is the last thing I'd want to do.

The interpreter asked us what questions we'd like to ask the officer, and I got in quickly with this one: Would you ask him if he'd tell us in his own words the story of the battle. And this is the story he told; a story of unbelievable and terrible hardship; a tragic story of how a whole division might have been saved if different orders had been given.

I'm going to give it in the form of a week's diary, which is just how he told it.

He joined his regiment on December 30th, and even then there was no more food for the horses. The poor animals were being fed with bark off the trees. Five hours after his arrival the Finns partly cut the road leading from the Russian border to Lake Kianta and on to Suomussalmi village; and on New Year's Eve they cut it completely, thus preventing any further supplies from reaching the division. When dawn broke on New Year's Day there was just enough food to give the troops very short rations for two days. And this battle didn't end, remember, until January 7th.

On the afternoon of January 2nd the Finns attacked the 146th regiment, which had been reinforced by two companies, utterly destroying it except for two or three

hundred men. After this, he said, the Finns seemed to be everywhere. They concentrated an artillery and machine-gun attack on the 25th regiment and harassed all the eight regimental headquarters as well as divisional headquarters. The 44th division, which had been trained for open fighting, was no match for the Finns when it came to forest fighting, he said.

On the night of January 2nd many officers urged General Vinogradoff, who commanded the division, to retire while there was still time. But this he refused to do until he got his orders from higher quarters.

On January 3rd there was no food for the men. General Vinogradoff sent the two remaining companies of the 146th regiment, together with one battalion of the 25th regiment, to try and open the road, and at the same time another infantry battalion was ordered to open a cut in the road at another place. The Russians continued for three days attempting to open the road, but all to no purpose; seventy per cent of their men were killed or wounded in the process.

On January 4th three small Russian aeroplanes of the U2 type, which are used for training, tried to drop food. They each carried two bags of hard tack; six bags of food for a division!—and even then they were unsuccessful. All through January 5th the relentless attacks of the Finns continued.

By January 6th the Russians were almost mad with cold and hunger. And still the Finns kept at them. At last, at 5 p.m. on this day, General Vinogradoff gave the order by radio to all regimental headquarters that the retreat was to begin not earlier than 9.30 that night. The officer thought that the order came from the 9th Army Corps

headquarters, but it may have come from Voroshiloff himself.

Well, by this time it was too late. Every time the Russians saw a chance to break through the Finnish lines they tried, but they were now too weak; and their spirit was completely broken and they were panicky. When I saw the battlefield myself and was told that hundreds of Russians were shot down in their shelters and dugouts without attempting to fight, I had wondered why they hadn't made more of an attempt at resistance. Now I know. You don't go out and fight when you've had nothing to eat for five days in a temperature of 30° below zero. You just don't care any more.

And that is the end of the story as far as the 44th division is concerned. What happened to its commander, General Vinogradoff, remains a mystery. This Russian officer says that he last saw him at 9 p.m. in a tank which was with seven others 22 kilometres from the frontier. He has also heard that the general was killed in the tank. Another story he has heard was that after going five kilometres the general got out of the tank and made his way on foot to the frontier, where he was picked up by Russian patrols, court-martialled later, and finally shot. But the real story as I say, still remains a mystery.

All that remains to be told is this Russian officer's personal story of his capture. In the last stages of the fighting his commanding officer, who had been severely wounded, asked him to take over command. But by this time the regiment was almost decimated, and what was left was nothing but a rabble. He was wounded himself and could hardly walk and was helped along by one N.C.O. and two men. At ten p.m. one of them had been

shot. At eleven another had been killed, and at one a.m. on January 7th he found himself alone. He managed to drag himself through the forest for nearly four miles in the direction of the Russian frontier until he couldn't go on any longer. He lay down and rested in the terrible cold; he was found by a Finnish ski-patrol at nine o'clock in the morning. By this time he was half frozen and couldn't move. He said the Finns treated him very kindly. They gave him a hot drink and two men carried him for nearly two miles on their backs until they got a stretcher. Then he was given first aid in a forest hut, taken on a sledge to a field-hospital and finally reached the present camp.

That is the end of the story, the first story to be told from the Russian side, and it adds a chapter to the epic of Suomussalmi without which, I think, it cannot be called complete.

OULU, *February 3rd, 1940*

IN the Russian prisoners-of-war camp I visited yesterday, I saw the only woman prisoner whom the Finns have so far taken in this war. The idea of a woman being taken prisoner at all seems extraordinary, but I'll explain that later.

She came into the room dressed in some clothes the Finns had given her, because when she was captured she was wearing an ordinary Russian soldier's uniform. She had been a first-class nurse attached to a division which was defeated on the North Central front. There are details about this battle, particularly about the field-hospital and ambulances which the Russians left behind them in their retreat, which are just so appalling that you can't talk about them. And to think that this girl had been through all this horror seemed too awful even to consider.

She was a nice-looking girl with rather slanting, oriental-looking eyes, with all the sadness in the world in them. Poor girl, it was scarcely to be wondered at when she had been forced to leave her husband and two-year-old baby back in Russia, in Leningrad.

She told me she had been called up—she was on a reserve of nurses—on September 7th. I said that surely

the fact that she had a young child would exempt her from such service, but she said no. Only mothers who are actually nursing infants are exempted. In the middle of September the troops she was with were sent farther north. And then she went to Russian Karelia, not far from the Finnish border, where the troops were building a new road to the frontier. When the Russians crossed into Finland on November 30th she went with them. There were also two other women nurses attached to the same regiment, and this, it seems, is a normal thing in the Russian Army.

When the Russian troops were given the order to retreat most of them made off into the forest, leaving the wounded to freeze to death in the ambulances and in the Finnish farm-house which was used by the Russians as a field-hospital. Both the other nurses had been wounded, and they almost certainly shared this terrible fate. Not a very pretty example of the civilising influence of the Soviet Union which they are so anxious to bring to Finland!

This poor girl went off into the forest with a group of men who had a map and a compass. But somehow the party got split up and finally she found herself alone with a Russian doctor, and with whom she was eventually captured by a Finnish patrol on the shores of Lake Kianta the next morning.

And now she is the only woman prisoner of war in Finland. She has been given a room of her own and she helps the Finnish nurses to look after the wounded Russian prisoners.

Later I talked to the doctor who was with her when she was captured. He spoke German, so I could talk to him freely without an interpreter. I asked him about the girl.

He said:

‘Well, being a prisoner of war is a wretched business, anyway, but for a woman—of course the Finns are doing all they can for her, but it’s the saddest thing I’ve ever seen. She just cries herself to sleep every night.’

I asked him one last question: ‘Don’t you think it’s an extraordinary thing to have women in the front line in a war like this at all?’ He replied: ‘Yes, it is. But it’s like this: in peace-time we always use women nurses, and when this war came we had no trained male nurses available. So the women had to be called up. I quite agree with you that it’s all wrong, but there was no alternative.’

Thus, through the extraordinary lack of organisation of the Russian Army, women, who may be used to all the hardships of nursing, but who are in no sense used to the hardships of open warfare, are sent right into the front line.

### *In retrospect, LONDON*

I GOT back to Rovaniemi to find the Hotel Pohjanhovi almost entirely deserted. While we had been away on the North Central front the Russians had raided the town on two successive days, dropping about three hundred bombs. Two days of this had been enough for most of the correspondents there; and I don’t blame them, because there was no reason to suppose the raids would not continue. They had moved on to Tornio, near the Swedish frontier.

The hotel had not actually been hit, but several bombs had fallen very near it, smashing all the plate-glass windows of the big dining room, which had now been boarded up, so that we had to have the lights on all through the



day. As soon as we arrived we were told that we should have to be out of the place by nine o'clock in the morning, and must not come back until sunset.

We returned after sunset, and I went to bed very tired at about midnight. The next morning I found that the order to get out of the hotel by nine o'clock was intended to be taken seriously. So much so, indeed, that I had to go without breakfast. I asked where I was expected to go for the next six hours, and they told me there was a hut in the woods, the other side of the Kemi river, about three miles away. Seeing a pile of skis in the hall, I found a pair which fitted me and set out, following other ski tracks. The bank down to the river was very steep and bumpy, and I fell half way down. Then I walked across the frozen river, and following the tracks finally arrived at a large log cabin. In front of it was a rifle range, where a Finnish soldier was trying out a captured Russian machine-gun.

I found Herbert Uxkull of the United Press in the hut, the only correspondent who had stayed in Rovaniemi. We found that by climbing a few hundred feet above the hut we could get a very good ski run back. We clambered up to a sort of look-out, where one could get a most wonderful view over Southern Lapland. It was the place where the tourists go in the summer to look at the midnight sun! But the little tower on top of the hill now contained a nest of machine-guns.

While we were up there an air-raid alarm sounded, and we hid under a fallen fir-tree, hoping for the best. All round us a herd of reindeer rootled about in the snow, paying no attention either to us or to the planes which soon came over. But we needn't have worried. The planes were a squadron of British Gloster Gladiators, flown by

Swedish pilots, which had just arrived. They were successful in keeping the Russians away during the day-time—but they could do nothing at night because there were no searchlights.

And that same night at about ten-thirty came another alarm. I went out with Walter Kerr of the *Herald Tribune*. There were some air-raid shelters a hundred yards or so from the hotel, but they were only blast and splinter proof, and a number of people have been killed in one just like them during the bad raids a few days before. So we went on, and climbing a little way down the bank of the river, lay down in the snow. I cannot describe how cold it was. It was really unbelievable. But then we buried ourselves in the snow, and this made things a little better.

The night was deadly quiet. The only sound we heard for a long time was that of the Lapp dogs barking at the neighbouring farms. At times we thought we heard something else; but it was only the wind blowing through the telephone wires. Finally, another sound came, which we soon recognised as the drone of aeroplane engines. It drew nearer and nearer. Then six great flashes lit up the sky behind us, to be followed a second later by six roars as the bombs hit the outskirts of the town to the south. So long as they confined their bombing to that side of the town, I thought, we were fairly safe, because we were well below the top of the river bank. But then the planes changed course and seemed to be coming towards us. The prospect began to look unhealthy. If they hit the frozen river in an attempt to smash the railway bridge we should have chunks of ice as well as bomb-splinters to contend with. There were some small willow bushes growing a little way farther down the bank, and hearing the planes approach

still nearer we scrambled down towards them. They did at least give the illusion of protection, although we might have wrapped ourselves in newspaper for all the real good they would have been.

The planes seemed to come right over our heads. Of course, we couldn't see them, and they may have been some distance away. But this made everything seem much worse. If you know a plane is a hundred yards wide of you, you haven't much to worry about. But to have no idea where it is makes the suspense very unpleasant. However, these planes, after seeming to fly right over us, unloaded ten bombs the other side of the river and then went home, presumably because they had no more. We learned later that there had been scarcely any damage done—except to our own nerves.

The next few days were really very pleasant. I spent the evenings writing up material I had obtained on the trip the week before; and the days ski-ing and rifle-shooting in brilliant sunshine out in the forest. We had one more of these night alarms, which led to nothing, and always two or three day alarms; but the four fighters seemed capable of keeping everything away.

The only fly in the ointment was the censor, who became increasingly difficult to deal with.

ROVANIEMI, *February 6th, 1940*

I THINK I am the first correspondent in Finland to have talked to a member of a ski-patrol which has been right through the Russian lines to the Leningrad-Murmansk railway, almost on the White Sea. I'd heard of this spectacularly dangerous journey having been made, but I've never met anyone who has come across the men who have done it.

It all happened—like these things generally do seem to happen—by sheer luck. I went round with Virginia Cowles, who is out in Finland for the *Sunday Times*, to the Klubi in Oulu, one of those local Finnish clubs which you find in every town in Finland and which seem automatically to make foreigners honorary members. We got talking to a Finn who spoke fairly good English, and when I told him I wanted to meet some ski-patrol men he said that as it happened he was meeting two that evening who were back on a few days' leave.

And one of these was a tough-looking young fellow of just over twenty who had just come back from this amazing trip into Russia. He had been a forester before the war and so was particularly well suited for the job. He described how the party of eighteen men started from the Finnish

lines, taking with them two *pulkkas*, the little Lapp sledges which look like small canoes and are generally drawn by reindeer. I asked him what provisions they took, and he said smoked reindeer-meat, bread and butter and plenty of sugar. The sugar because it is very good for stamina. And you need something to keep that going when you are travelling over thirty miles a day.

This patrol travelled light. They took no tents with them and for shelter depended upon forest huts if they were lucky, failing which they built walls of snow round the base of a large pine tree and got what cover they could from that. Imagine the toughness of these men standing this in a temperature of around twenty below zero. Every night several men in the patrol were detailed off to act as watch, taking turns in ski-ing round the camp in circles. But on this trip they were lucky. They ran into no Russians. They were well equipped with maps, and one man in the patrol knew the Russian countryside near the border quite well, having often crossed it in peacetime rounding up reindeer which had strayed.

And so, after several days of this unbelievable hardship, they reached the railway. I asked this man if they had dynamited the line, as I had heard that this had been done by patrols, but he said they could not possibly have carried enough explosives to do enough worth-while damage. A railway line is easily repaired if only a few yards are destroyed. But included among the cargo of those two *pulkkas* was a large number of hand grenades and small egg bombs, with which they made lightning raids on some of the rolling stock on the line. In spite of the fact that the line is heavily guarded they succeeded in destroying a petrol tank-car and also setting on fire a

number of trucks full of food and supplies for the fronts. Then, dodging the bullets of the Russian guards, they darted back into the forest. They remained in hiding there for a while and then repeated the raid on another part of the line. Finally satisfied, they made their way back to their own lines. The whole trip there and back had taken just over a week, and they hadn't lost a single man.

Well, that was one of the more spectacular of these Finnish ski-patrol actions which are doing so much to harass the Russians and cut off their supplies. They are going on all the time. Patrols number anything from ten to a hundred and fifty men, but the average is generally around twenty. They think nothing of attacking ten times that number of Russians.

The other ski-patrol man who was with us that evening had been a village schoolmaster before the war. The last thing he would have thought about three months ago would have been killing Russians. But he smiled evasively when asked how many Russian cap badges he had collected.

These ski-patrols in their white clothes have constantly been described as gliding silently like ghosts through the forest. I've seen them and heard them lots of times, and in the ordinary way skis make a very definite swishing and crunching noise on the frozen snow. But when the enemy is sighted or heard it is an entirely different story. Then the Finns abandon their ski-sticks, unsling the rifles or machine-pistols with which they are armed, and crouching low over their skis, really do creep along silently. When they are near enough they shoot from behind trees. Even a small tree will give them good cover, because they say the Russians often use soft-nosed bullets which, though they

give you a nasty wound if they hit you, can't penetrate a tree.

The Finns hardly ever take any prisoners on these patrols because the Russians always fight to the last. It's been drummed into them that the Finns shoot their prisoners, and so they think they may as well die fighting anyway. And Finns don't take chances on a Russian being dead, because 'corpses' have been known to come to life again and shoot them from behind. If one of their own men is wounded they make an improvised sledge out of his skis and drag him back on that.

These are some of the things we learned that evening from these two Finnish ski-patrol men. We asked for personal stories as well, but most of them were so lurid that they'd make the air sizzle if I told them. Before the party broke up, Virginia told them the story of how she and an Italian officer had captured a Russian tank during the Spanish war. They said she'd better join one of their patrols and capture another, and we both agreed that anyway we'd far sooner fight *with* them than against.

ROVANIEMI, *February 6th, 1940*

I HAVE just come back to Rovaniemi. On Wednesday and Thursday last week, while I was away on the North Central front, the Russians dropped three hundred and twenty bombs on this little town. And they dropped them from a height of nearly ten thousand feet; a height from which it would be absolutely impossible to distinguish between civil and military objectives.

I expect you've already heard of the ghastly things that happened in those raids. How, on the first day, by cruel bad luck, a small high explosive and incendiary bomb, weighing only 12 kilos—about 30 pounds—crashed through the roof of a hospital-shelter. How, among the eight people who were killed instantly, were two nurses and one poor woman who was expecting a baby. Thirty people were injured in this shelter; four of them so badly that they have since died. And that was not all. Of the twenty people altogether who were killed by this absolutely indiscriminate bombing, three were children. A local chemist's two little boys of four and five years of age were killed in the cellar of their shop when a bomb struck the house. A doctor here had what was perhaps the cruellest blow of all. Only a few days before, his sister had been



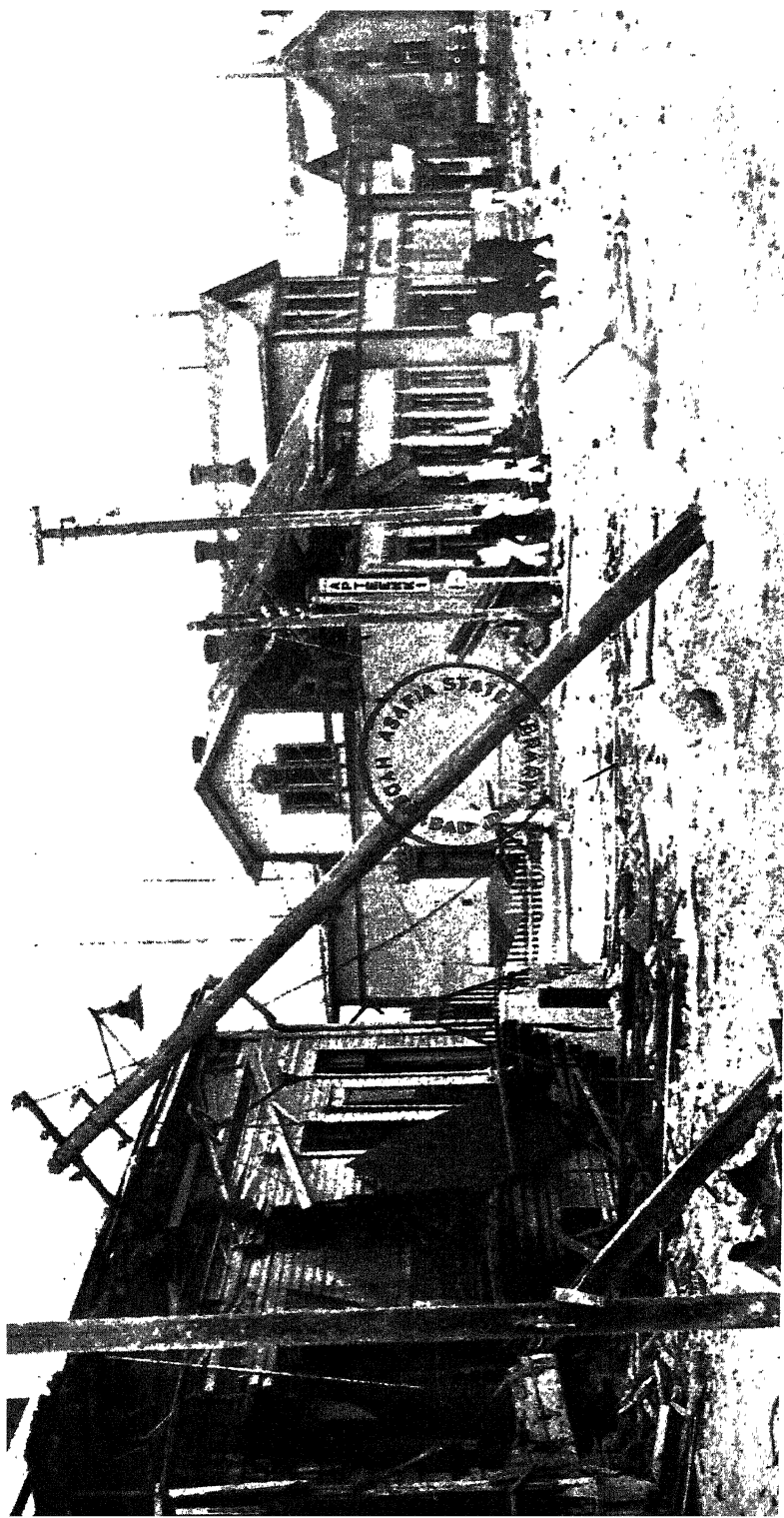
killed by a bomb in South Finland. His wife and two children came back to Rovaniemi recently, thinking it was a comparatively safe place. And now he has only one child and a wife who has been terribly injured.

Rovaniemi hasn't even got a zoo any more. Admittedly, the zoo consisted only of one little bear who used to be a great favourite with tourists, but he too is a victim of the raid. The damage to buildings can be seen everywhere. Two banks have been hit. So has the local cinema, and a church is also pitted by splinters and has all its windows broken.

Now, I know all this has been told before, but I don't think it can be told too often, because it's just another, and a particularly bad example, of what the Russian raiders can do and are doing every day, solely because they are up against virtually no opposition.

As I've said before, I know myself what it feels like to be in a town being bombed and knowing that the only thing which will make the raiders go away is the fact that they have no more bombs to drop. And it is the most tragic thing about this war that while the Finns are putting up such a magnificent performance against tremendous odds in the front line, they have to sit back and watch the Soviet planes bombing their open towns because they haven't got sufficient anti-aircraft defences to stop them.

Pursuit planes are, at last, coming into the country. There are a few at Rovaniemi now. And even these have been enough to stop the raiders coming again, at least in daylight. But Rovaniemi is only one place, and there are many others which must at least have this much protection before the appalling bombing of civilians can be checked. And with the spring coming along and the days getting



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ROVANIEMI, THE MAIN STREET

longer, things will be even worse. In the summer in Finland there are almost twenty-four hours of daylight.

I have travelled almost three thousand miles since I've been in this country and I've discussed this war with all sorts and conditions of people—and it's always the same story. Our people can look after the Russians at the front all right, but before we can really drive them out of the country we must have more pursuit planes.

*In retrospect, LONDON*

THE new censor in Rovaniemi had as much to do as anyone with my returning south. I had thought I was beginning to understand the workings of these remote creatures' minds, but this particular one always defeated me. He utterly refused to pass the next broadcast in this book, which seemed to me one of the most harmless I had made. So I put it in my pocket and later sent it from Helsinki.

It was not a particularly eventful journey, but it became most uncomfortable towards the end, and the eating problem was as acute as ever. We arrived in Helsinki about fourteen hours late. During the last six hours the train was packed tight with women and children returning from evacuation. I thought this a bad idea in any case, but as the hours went by it seemed worse and worse.

Helsinki was as crowded with journalists as ever, but there were a lot of new faces. The sole topic of conversation was the big Russian offensive on the Isthmus, of which we in Lapland had scarcely been aware.

HELSINKI, *February 13th, 1940*

I'M back in Helsinki again after being away in Lapland for the last three weeks or so. One of the first things I did on my return was to buy the English newspapers, which get here pretty quickly by air mail, and it interested me to learn from the Stockholm correspondent of one of them that Rovaniemi had been practically levelled to the ground and was almost uninhabitable.

I can only say that I, and several of my fellow journalists in Finland, have been inhabiting Rovaniemi in quite considerable comfort for the past week, and that seems to go for the rest of the town as well.

As I said in a talk I gave from there, the Russians certainly did do a considerable amount of damage in the two big raids they made about a fortnight ago. When I went to a bank, for instance, I found that it had suffered a direct hit from a bomb, and business was being carried on in temporary premises nearby while repairs were being made. Another bank was carrying on its business with broken windows filled in with cardboard, and great patches of brickwork showing where the plaster had fallen away. I went into a department store, the outside of which

was blackened and pitted with bomb splinters, but inside things were going on very much as usual.

The hotel there was certainly less of a hive of activity than when I first arrived. It is an extraordinary place; a sort of crazy, Hollywood-dream of a place, all chromium plate and mirrors and the last thing in the world you'd expect to find in Lapland. But it had been built for summer tourists who go up to Petsamo and stop at Rovaniemi for their first glimpse of the midnight sun. When I went there for the first time three weeks ago, part of the hotel was being used as a hospital. Part of the entrance hall was screened off as an operating theatre, and the rattle of basins and medicine bottles mixed in with the clatter of a battery of typewriters from the gallery above, where, at that time, there were between forty and fifty journalists.

But all that has changed now. We led a strange life there during the last week; we were out of the hotel early in the morning and didn't come back until late afternoon. We spent the days in the woods a few miles away, going there on skis. The day I left Rovaniemi three of us decided to return to the hotel rather earlier than usual, as we had packing and various other things to do before leaving. We had ski-ed down a steep slope on to the frozen river when the alarm sounded. Well, this was just about the most unhealthy spot in an air-raid that we could possibly have chosen and so, doing as I'm told the Russian ski-patrols do when they're really in a hurry, we took off our skis and ran back up the hill. We were all so completely out of breath when we got to the top that we couldn't go a yard farther. So we took the first cover available, which proved to be, of all things, a row of bathing huts. We

must have presented the most idiotic spectacle; three people, in a temperature of well below zero, sitting in a bathing hut waiting for something to happen.

We didn't have to wait long. Very soon the drone of planes could be heard coming nearer and nearer, and that matchboard bathing hut didn't feel at all satisfying as protection. At last the noise of the aeroplanes came so near that I poked my head out of the hut to have a look. But I never thought I'd be so glad to see a swastika on the wings of an aeroplane as close as this one was, but it was the most tremendous relief here, because ever since the war of independence a blue swastika has been the emblem of the Finnish air-force.

After that we didn't worry any more. This was one of the little group of Finnish planes (they were British Gloster Gladiators) flown by Swedish pilots which, ever since they have been here, has been successful in keeping the Russian bombers away from Rovaniemi. We watched them circling over the town for half an hour or so until the all-clear sounded when, feeling much better about things, we once again ski-ed down on to the river and across to the hotel.

HELSINKI, *February 14th, 1940*

A SPECIAL communiqué given out late last night gave details of the terrific struggle which has been raging on the Karelian Isthmus for the last thirteen days; a struggle in which the Russians are putting all they know into a gigantic attempt to break through the Finnish defences while the weather is still good. Because the latter half of February and March is the season of heavy snowstorms, which will seriously hamper troop movements and particularly mechanised forces, whilst after the snows will come the thaw which, for many weeks, will make the roads almost impassable.

And so this battle is going on with a fierce, concentrated intensity as has not been seen since the days of the Great War. In fact, military experts declare that the severity of the fighting, particularly in the Summa sector, equals almost anything that happened even in the battle of the Somme.

Certainly, so far as the use of mechanised forces is concerned, nothing like this has even been seen before, and some idea of the magnitude of this can be grasped by the fact that in three or four days the Finns destroyed as many as two hundred tanks—incidentally they disabled one huge tank which weighed seventy tons.

The Russian artillery barrage hasn't ceased for days, and in the Summa sector, where the fighting is most concentrated, it is estimated that they sent over three hundred thousand shells in one day alone; and this, as I say, has been going on for days. Whilst yesterday hundreds of Russian aeroplanes were bombing and machine-gunning the Finnish positions.

The Russian losses have been terrific. In the past twelve days they have amounted to between thirty and forty thousand killed: an average of over three thousand a day. In the fierce hand-to-hand fighting two nights ago, the Finnish soldiers used their *pukas*—the razor-sharp hunting knives which all Finns carry—with the result that Russian dead are piled up in enormous frozen heaps in front of the Finnish lines. They are good troops too, well clothed and well armed—yet for every man, company, or even regiment that falls, there is always another to take its place from the inexhaustible millions of Russia's man-power.

So these next few weeks on the Karelian Isthmus are indeed destined to be critical ones for Finland. The war has reached a phase that, if ever help was needed from abroad, both in men and material, to save Western civilisation from this relentless attack from the East, it is needed now.



HELSINKI, *February 15th, 1940*

AT about 2.30 p.m. yesterday afternoon, seventeen Russian bombers, flying at a height of about eight thousand feet, dropped two hundred and thirty bombs, most of them incendiary, on the little cathedral town of Borga, about thirty miles east of Helsinki. Borga is a town of some six thousand inhabitants, which by no stretch of the imagination could be described as a military objective. It is chiefly noted as a place of historical interest, for it was in its sixteenth century cathedral that the Tsar Alexander I summoned the Finnish Diet in 1809 to promise them virtual autonomy for Finland.

In the afternoon the news came through to Helsinki that this little town was in flames, and shortly afterwards a large party of journalists went down to see the damage. I was lucky, because Mr. Hannula, the Minister of Propaganda, invited me to accompany him personally in his car. So I got there ahead of the rest of the party.

Long before we reached the town one could see the sky lit up with a red glow from the burning buildings. Most of you have seen a house on fire at one time or another; but try to picture a whole town with houses blazing everywhere. Twenty-eight houses were destroyed,

they said, though it looked to me far more. Many of them were wooden, and were burnt almost to the ground by the time I got there. All that was left were the brick chimneys. Those chimneys, which you see all over Finland, look like great tomb-stones marking the spot where a gaily painted wooden house once stood.

The streets were running with water from the hoses of the fire brigade, which was doing its best to keep under control the fires on the stone and brick-built houses. The local brigade was being helped by a Swedish volunteer brigade which had been rushed from Helsinki as soon as the news came through. And between them they were doing wonders in dealing with what looked like an almost impossible situation.

Luckily the alarm had come in plenty of time, so that as far as is known no one was even hurt; but the damage to property must have been tremendous. As I say, most of the bombs which were dropped were small incendiaries, which do very little damage if they fall out in the open. Owners of houses had managed to save a certain amount of their furniture and belongings before the fires had really gained control, because everywhere I went in the streets were piles of furniture and bedding—all of it soaked with water from the fire-hoses, while the unfortunate owners were doing their best to stop sparks and pieces of burning wood from falling on it from above. The hotel, a big modern building, looked like a saucepan which is boiling over; incendiary bombs had evidently exploded in the attics, and you could see tongues of flame and spasmodic puffs of smoke coming out from under the eaves. The fire brigade were getting this well under control by the time I left.



*Exclusive News Agency*

A FINNISH TRENCH ON THE KARELIAN FRONT

As well as incendiary bombs, the raiders had also dropped about twenty high explosive bombs, some of them weighing up to two hundred and fifty pounds. The head of the local A.R.P. was showing us where some of these had fallen, and while he was doing so a minor tragedy occurred. We came upon a crater in the middle of a street which had been filled with water and had frozen over. I said I thought it looked like a 100 kilo bomb, but the A.R.P. warden said no, he thought it was only 25 kilos. As he said this he stepped forward one pace too far and, breaking through the thin film of ice, went right up to his neck in the unthinkably cold water. He floundered about in the crater, but finally struggled out and was all for continuing to show us round. It was only with the greatest difficulty that we persuaded him to go home and change his clothes.

They're tough, these Finns!

*In retrospect, LONDON*

I HAD been over a week in Helsinki without being able to get anywhere, and I was beginning to feel desperate for lack of material for broadcasting. My efforts to get to one of the southern fronts were all in vain. Then I remembered a letter of introduction to General Walden which I had not used. I had realised that he was a very important industrialist, but it was only later that I discovered him to be Field Marshal Mannerheim's right-hand man. With some difficulty I got an appointment. He was obviously a busy man, and he wasted no time.

'Well, what can I do for you, Mr. Ward?'

I explained my position. It was no use my being an observer if I was given nothing to observe. I said that if he could help me to reach either the Isthmus or the north of Lake Ladoga I should be profoundly grateful. The general said he did not know why I should think him capable of doing anything of the kind, since he had no influence in such matters. I replied that he was well known to be one of the most influential men in Finland. Finally, he said he would see what could be done, although he could make no promises: and the end of it was that his secretary telephoned me the same evening to say I could go to North Ladoga the following day.

Travelling by train in Finland in wartime was never a picnic, but this trip to Sortoala was certainly the worst I had struck. It began well enough. We started in the evening, a very international party, in which I was the only British representative. The others included a Frenchman, a Swiss, a Swede, a Norwegian, an American and a Finn—the last-named our Press officer.

After a comfortable night in a sleeper we found that we had missed our morning connection, which meant a wait of four hours. We filled in a part of the time by eating an enormous breakfast, and this turned out to be fortunate, for it was the only food we were destined to have until the early hours of the next morning. The little hotel which provided this excellent breakfast had had a corner torn away by a bomb, but they had managed to patch it up and keep the place going.

We continued our journey uneventfully all through the day, but soon after dark the air-raid alarms started. There were four altogether, while we were at a little station near a big railway junction called Elisenvaara. This station

was in the middle of the forest, and everyone tumbled out of the train at the first alarm and took cover among the trees. Soon we heard the drone of aeroplane-engines in the distance. They roared overhead. However, they evidently had not spotted our train—or perhaps they had other plans—because they passed over harmlessly, and a minute or two later we heard the crash of bombs falling on Elisenvaara. This alarm lasted about twenty minutes, and then we got back into the train.

We had no sooner settled down again than another alarm sounded—three sharp blasts on the engine's whistle. So out we went into the forest again. Once more planes roared overhead; but once more we were left alone. Most of us—that is to say the foreign correspondents—stayed in the train in comfort during the two further alarms; but the Finns religiously went out into the bitterly cold forest each time.

At last, after waiting a couple of hours, we went slowly on to Elisenvaara, where one or two fires were blazing as a result of the bombing we had heard. However, the station was untouched. By now everyone was ravenous, so we went into the station buffet, which turned out to be full of soldiers, but not of food. Although we raided the kitchen there was nothing to be had. We waited here for another two hours to let two hospital trains go by, and also to allow time for the repair of the track, which had been hit by a couple of lucky bombs a few miles outside the town.

Finally, after taking thirty-four hours over a journey which even in war-time should only have taken about eighteen, we arrived in Sortoala, on the shores of Lake Ladoga. There was a very good hotel which strangely enough had not been hit, though the rest of the town was

terribly damaged. We all wanted to stay there, but were told that it would mean spending most of our time in shelters.

Wearily, we got into cars to drive a farther fifteen miles to a country house, which had been taken for us, and which we were assured was very comfortable. It was. In fact, it was one of the most charming houses of its kind I have ever seen. It belonged to a rich Helsinki business man, who used it at week-ends. For a Londoner this would be about the same as having a week-end cottage in the Lake district, but the owner did not seem to worry about the distance. Certainly it was worth it, once one got there. The house was right on the shore of the lake, and in summer it must have been most beautiful.

We went in through the back door because the front one was snowed up, and stepped right into the most wonderful kitchen I have ever seen. It was like a huge Canadian log cabin, with gigantic beams—solid tree trunks—running across the ceiling. There was a very gratifying array of saucepans on the range, and two of the inevitable *lottas* told us supper would be ready in a few minutes. This wasn't so bad, seeing that it was two o'clock in the morning.

The next day the house was very cold—they dared not light fires for fear the smoke would give them away to Russian aeroplanes, as we were more or less on the direct line of flight. It was a beautiful day, and I spent the morning sitting on top of a hill behind the house, watching squadrons of Russian bombers flying over. We had to hide in or around the house until dusk, because the roads were death traps during the day.

The worst thing we suffered from on this trip was the

lack of cigarettes. There had been a pretty bad shortage in Helsinki for some time, because the Russians had bombed the two big factories. I solved the problem for the time being by the simple expedient of letting it be known that I was prepared to pay double for them. After this they seemed to arrive from nowhere. But I had been a bit careless about the supply for this trip and so, it seemed, had everyone else. Later, the shortage became terribly acute. Hitherto when I had gone to the front I had always taken a few hundred cigarettes to give to the soldiers, but on this trip the situation was reversed. I quite shamelessly begged them from the soldiers.



HELSINKI, *February 22nd, 1940*

I AM the first British correspondent to go to General Headquarters on the North East Ladoga front and to interview General Woldemar Heggland, who has been conducting the highly successful operations in this part of Finland.

The general has a quite unmilitary appearance; he is the intellectual type which one seems to find so often among high Finnish officers. In his headquarters, which had been a large farmhouse, he gave the first general outline which has been given to correspondents about the campaign he has been conducting.

He told how, at the beginning of the war, the invading Russian troops entered the country from three directions; how they were met at first by reinforced Finnish frontier guards who, according to prearranged plan, fought rear-guard actions back to their prepared positions. The Russian troops were highly mechanised and, as in other parts of Finland, they had to keep to the roads and attack in massed formations. The result was that their losses were very heavy, and many of their tanks were put out of action.

At the end of December came heavy snowfalls, which

hampered the Russians still more, and then the Finnish ski-patrol actions began. Ski troops with light artillery, bringing their transport with them on sleds through the forest, made lightning attacks on the Russian columns. Their object was to break through the columns at several points and cut off the enemy from its supplies. And these tactics have been so successful that they have resulted in the type of fighting which the Finns are now engaged upon here. They call it *motti* fighting.

*Motti* is a Finnish word of apparently quite indeterminate meaning which, in this sense, implies large or small groups of Russian troops who have been cut off from their main body and from their supplies. One *motti* may include a divisional headquarters; another may be chiefly artillery, which dig themselves in, fortify themselves as best they can, and remain where they are in a state of siege. I think the only comparison one can make is with the *laager* tactics which the Boers used in the South African War. Only imagine it on a larger scale with tanks instead of covered waggons.

At this stage the campaign presented a twofold aspect. The Finns had to look after these *mottis* and at the same time engage new and large forces which were hurriedly brought up to the rescue. The Russians used some of their best troops in these rescue columns, including a brigade of their famous parachute troops—without their parachutes. But the Finns have successfully met and stopped them. And they have destroyed several of the specially formed Russian ski-battalions which unsuccessfully tried to copy their own forest fighting tactics.

And so this campaign has resolved itself now into the investing and mopping up of these cut-off Russian detach-

ments. The general explained that for some time supply columns with food and ammunition used to come along the roads not knowing that their comrades had been cut off. So that at one time the *mottis* were in a state bordering on starvation, from which they were only saved by eating their horses and gathering what little they could from the sparse countryside. But now they are being continually, and it seems, fairly adequately victualled from the air. Bread, biscuits, meat and tea are dropped to them from aeroplanes, and I was told how by mistake the Finns sometimes get their share of this manna from heaven. They have discovered the signals the Russians make to their planes, particularly at night, and in copying them they receive quite a lot of the Russian food packages.

The Russians also get supplies of light ammunition from the air, but for heavier supplies they depend upon transport across the frozen Lake Ladoga. These transport columns are being continually shelled and machine-gunned by Finnish batteries on the islands in the lake.

General Heggland told how many high Soviet officers are caught in these surrounded *mottis*. In one, where the remains of two divisions are encircled, are the Divisional Commander and also the Army Corps Commander. The latter, by good, or bad fortune, was ahead of his relieving force in his staff-car, and was able to reach the cut-off troops. But his column was held up by heavy snow and the Finns did the rest. In another *motti* is Tank Brigade Commander who has the decoration of 'Hero of the Soviet Union.'

'He's not my idea of a hero,' said General Heggland. 'We can't persuade him to come out and fight!'

The general further explained that with more troops at

his disposal he could have cleared up the whole very favourable situation much more quickly. But he has conducted the campaign with a rigid economy of men. He told, for instance, how a Finnish detachment had killed three hundred Russians and taken one hundred and sixty prisoners with a loss of only three dead and six wounded themselves. And he added that the lack of pursuit planes to deal with the Russian victualling planes had also proved one of their most serious difficulties.

Just before I left to go up to the front the general said: 'I wish you would say this—that in spite of all our disadvantages, in lack of men and artillery and ammunition and planes—I had planned to drive the Russians back to their own country by the middle of January. But we are up against an enemy who won't come out into the open and fight; an enemy who prefers to starve to death in a hole in the ground and die like a rat in a trap. And, of course, dealing with that kind of thing takes time.'

HELSINKI, *February 22nd, 1940*

LAST Monday part of the Finnish official communiqué read like this:

'North-east of Lake Ladoga our troops achieved a great victory by capturing an important strong point held by the enemy in great force, in which connection 20 tanks, 36 guns of various types, 17 tractors, 32 field-kitchens, 25 automobiles, 200 vehicles, etc., fell into our hands. In addition one thousand two hundred Russians were killed and two hundred and fifty taken prisoner.'

Very likely you heard this in the news. I was lucky enough to be on the spot the very next day and to see for myself just what such a communiqué really means.

Before I tell the story I think I'd better explain, very quickly and briefly, what the fighting up in North-east Ladoga is like. Roughly speaking the Finnish tactics have been to split up the attacking Russian columns into several isolated detachments, and cut them off from their supplies. They call these cut-off bodies *mottis*. This particular *motti* consisted of some fifteen hundred men, and must have included a large proportion of the Divisional Staff, for there was a large number of officers among the prisoners taken. And its destruction means that the entire

Russian 18th division has now been annihilated, and the whole of its war material fallen into Finnish hands.

I had to go out there at night because the Russian air activity is so intense that it is impossible to use the roads in daylight. But it was brilliant moonlight, and one could see almost as well as by day. Long before I got to Syskyjarvi, where this *motti* was destroyed, I saw long columns of Finnish lorries and sledges dragging away booty. I counted seven first-class field guns of about the French 75 size, as well as several 15 centimetre howitzers and a number of tanks. And here and there were horse-drawn sledges piled high with rifles and bayonets and machine-guns and all the other lighter spoils of war.

At last I got to the beginnings of the scene of the destruction of this Russian detachment, and here I met the Finnish colonel who had directed operations.

I thought I had seen a good example of the horrors of war when I went to Suomussalmi a few weeks ago. But that was mild compared with what I saw here. Suomussalmi was, after all, three weeks old when I saw it. Many of the Russian dead had been taken away and buried and what were left were covered with a merciful blanket of snow. But this had happened only the day before, and those twelve hundred corpses were lying everywhere, just as they had fallen those few hours ago. And yet there was an appalling unreality about them. I think it was the dazzling moonlight did it; that made the whole thing seem a ghastly nightmare which couldn't really be true; from which one was going to wake up at any minute.

But it was true enough. As I began my walk down that mile or so of death and destruction, guns boomed in the distance and shells whistled high over my head.

‘Don’t worry about that,’ said the colonel, ‘those are my guns talking.’

The amount of war material which the Finns have gained from this success seemed staggering. As I say, it had just happened, and they hadn’t had time to take much away; one saw the whole affair in its entirety. The first thing I saw was a tank in almost perfect condition with piles of empty shell cases behind it and a lot of live shells too, just as it had been left by the Russians. There were thousands of live hand grenades which the Finns had collected in heaps. And here and there were great piles of rifles and machine-guns which were gathered together in convenient sledge loads to be taken away and used eventually against their former owners.

The dead were everywhere. They had been cleared off the road to make way for traffic, and at one place two bodies had landed upright in the snow at the side of the road. They had been frozen in horribly contorted positions; as they stood up there, silhouetted against the snowy bank in the moonlight, they looked like two performers in some dreadful dance of death.

I went on past more and more war material, and then the colonel said: ‘Come along out here and I’ll show you one of their howitzer batteries.’ We had to make our way through the trenches the Russians had dug, stepping over frozen bodies all the way, sometimes being actually forced to step on them, there were so many. They were frozen as hard as iron. At last we reached the battery. And standing there, leaning against a fifteen centimetre howitzer, with the dead gun crew as an audience, the colonel told me the story of the final destruction of this *motti*.

They had been in this place about a month, he said,

since they were originally cut off from the rest of the division. They extended for about a mile along the road and about five hundred yards to one side and three hundred to the other. They were very well dug in, their dug-outs being almost as good as the Finnish ones, and they had been living for the previous several weeks on their own horses and whatever food was dropped to them from aeroplanes. But they couldn't get any heavy ammunition.

'We just kept at them the whole time,' the colonel said, 'and when at last we figured out that they were running short of shells we moved up our own artillery and let them have it. Our infantry finished off what our artillery had left.'

I asked him how many casualties they had inflicted, and he reckoned about twelve hundred. But that, to him, was entirely unimportant compared with the material he had captured. When he talked about that he was like a small boy who has just been given a lot of toys.

'Look at this howitzer,' he said. It had a great jagged hole torn through the shield by a Finnish shell. 'We nearly spoiled this one, and that would have been a terrible pity because it's worth at least a million Finnish marks. But look, it's perfect.' And to prove it he opened the breech-block and shut it again and then worked the elevating and traversing gears, and it was—perfect. 'We've got four batteries of these,' he said, 'making twelve howitzers in all.' He added that the Russians had destroyed the breech-blocks of some of them, though they could be repaired fairly easily.

We made our way back to the road along that awful trench. As we went along the road we saw more tanks and more armoured cars; we saw field-kitchens with piles



of empty tins lying about near. We saw lorries and, as at Suomussalmi, we saw everywhere the incredible heaps of papers and books. I picked up a copy of the Moscow newspaper *Pravda*, dated only a few days before, which showed that their aeroplanes kept them in touch with the news as well as supplying them with food.

At last we got to the end of the road—the end, that is to say, so far as this scene was concerned. We were standing by a brand new anti-aircraft gun—a 1939 model—and the colonel said: ‘Well, you have seen what we have done here. There are more of these *mottis*, but we shall clean them up sooner or later.’

HELSINKI, *February 22nd, 1940*

Two hundred and fifty miles is about the distance from London to Exeter, I suppose, but maybe I'm wrong. But most of you must have done car trips of about that distance at one time or another. I want to try and tell you now what such a trip is like in Finland to-day.

I went up to North-east Ladoga by train, and what with air-raid alarms and one thing and another, the journey took about thirty hours. So that when I was offered a lift in a car for the return trip I was more than pleased. We started from Sortoala, the town on the north shore of Lake Ladoga which has been more damaged by Russian bombing than any other town I have seen in Finland so far. Our start was delayed by two air-raids, but we finally got away at 2 a.m. in the middle of a third raid, with the Russian bombers droning high up over our heads. But we were lucky.

We drove at first without lights because we got all the light we wanted from the moon. As dawn was breaking we drove into the town of Lapeenranta, only to find that the Russian bombers had been there a few hours ahead of us. I don't know how many bombs they had dropped, but it was plenty. They had evidently been high explosive

bombs mostly, but some incendiaries had also been dropped, because fires were blazing here and there. As usual, most of the bombs had fallen in the poorer part of the town and most of the houses hit had been little wooden ones. Everywhere I saw sledges carrying the pathetic belongings of these poor people to some place of comparative safety out in the country.

We were very hungry by this time, so we went to the local hotel to get some breakfast. I had just swallowed a mouthful of coffee when another air-raid alarm came. We stuffed bread and butter and boiled eggs into our pockets because if we stayed there we might have been delayed for hours, and we were in a hurry. To delay matters, there must needs be an argument over the bill, but we finally got into the car and out of the town in time. A few miles out of the town we heard the drone of aeroplane engines overhead and stopped the car quickly and took cover in the forest, dressed in our white capes. I saw a squadron of nine bombers flying high overhead. But as they left us alone we got back into the car and drove on.

The next big town was Kouvala, and there, too, we were welcomed by another air-raid alarm. In our hurry to get out of this place in time we took the wrong road for Helsinki and had to turn back and go right through the town again, driving through crowds of people scurrying for shelters. However, this alarm was evidently in plenty of time, because we saw no planes until we were well out in the country, when it was a question of taking cover once again in the woods.

We seem to have been lucky all through because all along the way we saw signs of recent bombing, though the next stage of the journey passed quietly enough except

for a collision with a sledge, which ended in our landing in a snow-filled ditch, and narrowly missing a telegraph pole. However, we got out of that all right and got to Porvoo, the town I had seen at night in flames about a week ago. There we stopped for lunch, which we wolfed down as quickly as we could, breakfast not having been a great success. And it was lucky we did because just as we were going to order coffee yet another air-raid alarm sounded. Missing his coffee upset the Frenchman—the *Paris Soir* correspondent—but that couldn't be helped.

And so we made the last stage of this thirteen hour journey into Helsinki, knowing by this time that we were going to arrive in the middle of another air-raid alarm. And we weren't disappointed. It was the fourth they had had that day. I've given up counting them now. I went to bed to the sound of one last night, dead tired, and was woken up by the same well-known siren this morning.

But later this morning it started to snow in Helsinki, and, I hope, over all Southern Finland. It will keep the raiders away while it lasts.

HELSINKI, *February 22nd, 1940*

WHEN I was up in North Ladoga a few days ago I didn't stay in the town of Sortoala, because to have done so would have meant spending practically the entire time in an air-raid shelter. I've seen some damaged towns in Finland, but nothing approaching Sortoala. As it happens, I didn't see the town by daylight, but in the moonlight it looked, I should think, even worse. Waves of Soviet bombers have subjected it to an almost unceasing bombardment for weeks now, and great tracts of the town are completely destroyed. Whole streets have gone except for here and there an isolated house which by some miracle has escaped. And where the wooden houses once stood are the inevitable tall chimneys which give the scene an even greater look of desolation.

I stayed some distance out of the town in an extremely comfortable country house on the shores of the great lake. The absolute peace of the scene was marred only by the drone of Russian bombing squadrons which passed almost continuously on their way to deal out more death and destruction all over the countryside.

The first evening I was there we drove out to see a section of the North-east Ladoga front. This took us through

some of the oldest forests in Finland. Gigantic fir trees heavily covered with snow lined the road, and as far as one could see into the forest on both sides was a magnificent picture of light and shade, the deep black shadows of the trees alternating with brilliant patches of moonlight. The beauty of the scene was breath-taking, but at the same time terrifying, and I could well understand the Russian soldiers' horror of forest fighting. For from their point of view every tree, every shadow, is a potential enemy.

Finally, we reached the headquarters of this particular sector. And there to my delight I found that the commander was an old friend, Colonel Svensson, whom I had first met about six weeks ago in Karelia. As we sat talking about one thing and another, he told me this story. A Swedish friend of his had given him a very fine rifle, and he decided to award it as a prize to the man in his command who had killed the most Russians. The prize went to Corporal Simo Hayha, who had been a farmer and a champion shot before the war. I saw a copy of the certificate which had accompanied the prize, and it said that this man had so far accounted for 219 of the enemy with his rifle for certain, and further he estimated 220 others with sub-machine guns; but of the latter figure he had modestly said that he couldn't be absolutely sure!

Colonel Svensson said that the Soviet aeroplanes had been dropping bombs rather uncomfortably close to him until he'd found a way to put a stop to it. And he took me out and showed me an anti-aircraft gun which was mounted in a bomb crater.

'You see, they do everything for us, these Russians,' he explained. 'They dig our gun pit and they even supply us with the gun; I don't know what we'd do without them.'

The colonel said he was very sorry he couldn't let us go right up to the front line because that night he was having a change-over of troops, and this must obviously be done with the utmost speed and quiet. So we said good-bye and went up to a position some little way behind the actual line. It was a slow drive because with the change-over going on traffic was coming from both directions. We passed columns of white-clad men on skis, and horse-drawn sledges carrying supplies. Even the horses were covered with white capes. The Russians were shelling as we approached our destination, but they had obligingly stopped by the time we got there. All the same I was not sorry to be in the deep and strongly-built dug-out where we were received by the lieutenant-colonel who was in charge of this particular section of the line.

He said that the Finns had retired by pre-arranged plan to these prepared positions at the beginning of the war, and that they had been there since December 5th. The Russians were continually, but unsuccessfully, trying to outflank them; he added that their forces had included at least four battalions of light tanks of seven to eight tons. Each battalion had consisted of fifty tanks.

He also stated that recently the Russian troops were of far higher quality. A few days before, the Finns had destroyed a ski-patrol of twenty-one men. They were obviously first-class troops who had only just arrived; they were good skiers and had good hickory skis; they didn't even carry any papers, which was strange for Russians. They were armed with nine automatic rifles, six machine-pistols and five automatic pistols; I saw some of these in the dug-out and they were beautiful weapons. The men were clean—another strange thing—and well clothed, and

their stores had even included American bacon—which the colonel said had been greatly appreciated by the Finns.

The colonel was telling how the Finns had accounted for three Soviet aeroplanes with automatic rifles in the last couple of weeks, when a young lieutenant came into the dug-out. He had just returned from a ski-patrol and now handed in his report. The colonel read it, smiled, patted the lieutenant on the shoulder and told him to go and get some rest. I asked the colonel if he could give a translation of the report, which he very kindly did. It read like this: But to make it clear I must explain that the Finns have given all the forest paths and tracks the names of streets in Helsinki for purposes of reference. Here, then, is the report:

‘We left, one officer and seven men, at 10 a.m., returning at 11 p.m. On the Esplanade we encountered a strong Russian patrol. I killed a man armed with an automatic rifle and as a result the enemy returned fire. I regret I was unable to capture the automatic rifle. My patrol retired slowly in the direction of our own lines, but found no Russians. At 6 p.m. we returned from the point marked on the attached map. Before we got back to our lines we exchanged some more shots with the enemy without result. We finally made our way back by way of the Adlon Restaurant.’

Just an ordinary patrol report such as is coming in every day all over Finland. But it is the work of these patrols which is doing so much to keep the enemy at bay.

*In retrospect, LONDON*

THANKS to that lift in the car I got back to Helsinki nearly two days earlier than I had hoped, and with enough



material for four talks. That was the beauty of having my broadcasts recorded in London.

Although I had been told that it would be impossible for me to broadcast from Sortovalä, Edmund Stevens of the National Broadcasting Company was given facilities to give two talks from there. However, when I saw how the local censor had slashed his copy, I raised no objections, because I thought I should be better off with my own censor in Helsinki.

I had written some of my stories in Sortovalä, and I did the rest the night I arrived back in Helsinki. I took them along to the censor the next morning, and at about two o'clock—half an hour before I was due to go on the air—I went back to collect them. I thought the censor looked unhappy when I went into his room, but I was unhappier myself when he told me with apologies that he could only pass one of my talks on his own responsibility. This was an unimportant little story about my drive back to Helsinki. It seemed that all my best stuff was to be stopped, and I was almost in tears. I argued and pleaded for twenty minutes, and finally my eloquence had some effect. After remaining adamant for some time, he agreed to pass all my stories except one, which, he insisted, he simply could not let through without referring it to a higher authority. He hoped he might be able to do this quite quickly, so I arranged that he should bring it down to me in the studio if all went well.

Meantime, I went down with the others. The procedure of giving these broadcasts was as follows. About a quarter of an hour before they were due to start, gramophone records were played from the studio. London listened in at pre-arranged times every day, and these were for them

to tune in on. I would then give two or three test talks of a minute or two each, and at the end of the last one I would say: 'That is the end of the last test talk. I shall begin the *actual* talk in exactly twenty seconds from now.' I would watch the twenty seconds pass on a stop-watch; then I began.

On this occasion, precisely at the end of the twenty seconds, and just as I was going to begin, the censor came into the room. He said:

'Mr. Ward, it will be all right about that other talk of yours. There's only one small thing. I'm afraid you can't use General Hagglund's name.'

I said: 'But that was a question which I particularly asked General Hagglund, and he gave me permission to use it.'

So an argument began which lasted about five minutes. Only about half-way through did I realise that the microphone was 'live,' so that London was picking it all up. I thought a recorded version of an argument between a correspondent and a censor would be too good to miss, so I continued it as hard as I could, mentioning the general's name as often as possible. All the same, in the end I was not allowed to use it.

During the afternoon I began to have a feeling that London hadn't picked up my talks: so I sent a telegram saying I was going to repeat them at nine o'clock that evening to make sure. Late that night London replied that nothing had been picked up in the afternoon, and that reception had been so bad in the evening that the talks were useless. Therefore I had to repeat them a second time the next day.

This was one of the occasions when I envied the newspaper correspondents. When they file a story, either by telephone or telegraph, they do at least know it has got there.

HELSINKI, *February 26th, 1940*

TO-DAY has been a day of air-raid alarms in Helsinki. The first came at about noon. I heard the sound of anti-aircraft fire and what I thought were bombs falling in the distance, but nothing about bombs has yet been confirmed. Nor has a rumour that a Russian plane was shot down.

I had just reached the Finnish Broadcasting House when the next alarm came. It was just about a quarter-past two. I went down to the basement and sat in the little emergency studio for a while, expecting to start my talk at any moment, but in the end the engineer came in and said that as the lines between Helsinki and Lahti were down it would be impossible to give the talk until later in the evening.

So I went and had a belated lunch, then a talk with a Swiss journalist who has a room on the top floor of the hotel here. We were in the middle of a discussion about the Isthmus campaign when the next alarm sounded. We were getting a bit tired of them by this time, so we paid no attention to it and went on talking until, suddenly, we heard the drone of aeroplane engines right overhead. We ran downstairs and got out into the street just in time to see the most amazing sight.

Two Russian planes were streaking across the sky very high up directly over our heads. And immediately the Finnish anti-aircraft guns opened up. You heard the explosion and then, an instant later, saw a little puff of white smoke where the shell had exploded high up in the clear blue sky. The roar of the guns went on and the puffs of smoke appeared, as it seemed, all around the Russian planes. Then I heard a different engine note as a Finnish fighter chased after the Russian machines, and all disappeared into the distance. It was a thrilling spectacle.

*In retrospect, LONDON*

ALMOST daily air-raid alarms in Helsinki continued. It seemed to be almost impossible to get out of the town. And there was only one place where I and all the other correspondents wanted to go. This was the Isthmus front, or at least, Viipuri. Not a single correspondent had been to either for about a month. So I decided to see what could be done once again with General Walden.

A couple of days later a small party of journalists, myself included, were told we could go to Viipuri. We had first to go through the form of signing a paper to say that we did not hold the Finnish authorities responsible for any loss of life or property which we might incur on the trip. It was the first time I had heard that the Finns ever held themselves responsible for the lives of foreign correspondents. So far as I know, none of them ever did get hurt. I shall never know what would have happened if we had.

We started off on this trip by car in darkness, and arrived at a town about fifty miles from Viipuri in the early

hours of the morning. Before dawn we were on the road again. The temperature had dropped during the night; it was blowing hard, and wet splashes of snow beat against the windscreen from a leaden sky. It was, in fact, an admirable day. We didn't see a single Russian plane.

When I had last been in Viipuri, over a month before, there had not been many obvious signs of damage. At that time there were still several thousand people living in the town, and life was as normal as could be expected in the circumstances. It was a very different Viipuri I was to see this time.

HELSINKI, *February 29th, 1940*

I'M going to try and tell you to-day what modern warfare and armaments can do to a city which once had about 80,000 inhabitants.

Two days ago I was offered the chance of going to Viipuri on the Karelian Isthmus. Viipuri, the second biggest town in Finland, has been bombed and shelled consistently ever since the beginning of the war, but with ever-increasing ferocity since the big Russian offensive started on the Isthmus at the beginning of this month.

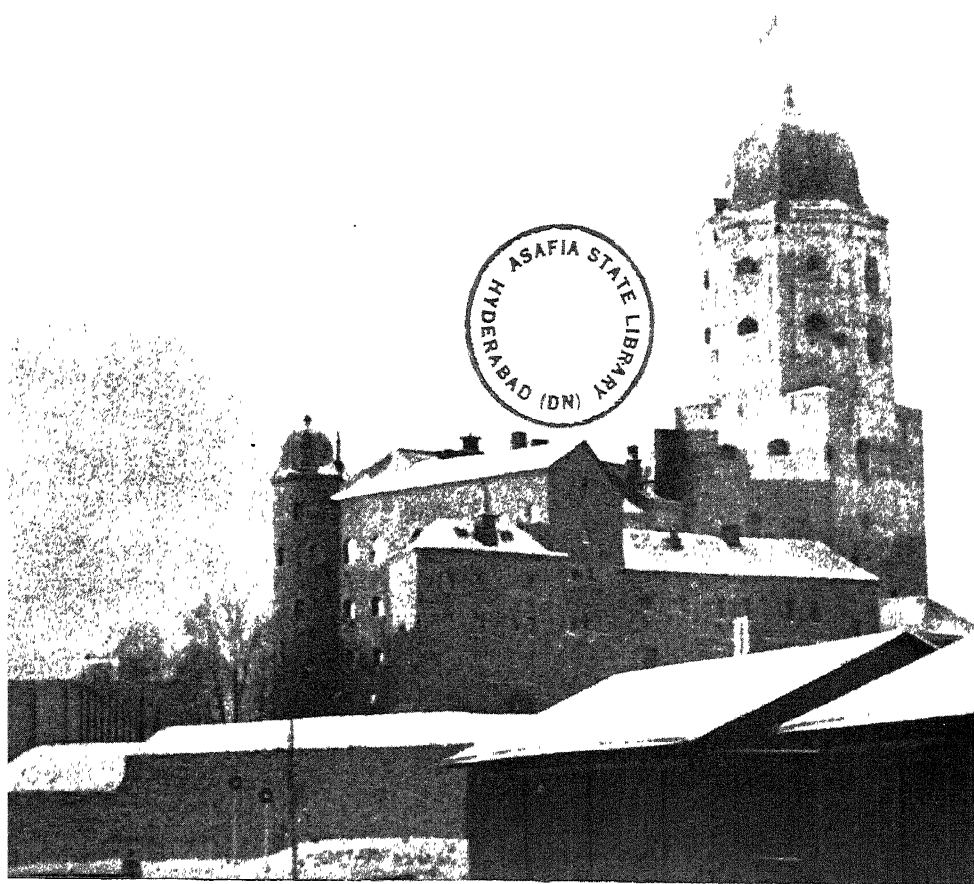
After an all-night drive from Helsinki, the first sight of Viipuri was the old castle silhouetted against the sky, with the Finnish flag flying proudly from its battlements. We crossed into the city over a pontoon bridge, which sagged drunkenly in the middle where one of the pontoons had been struck by a bomb. Our car stopped outside a block of flats of which now only the walls are standing. The snow all around was pink, caused by showers of brick-dust which had been scattered when the building was hit. A very heavy bomb must have struck the place, and a great jagged hole told how a shell had completed the work of destruction. Looking back on the castle, I saw that though it had been hit it hadn't as yet been badly damaged.

And then I began a walk round the city, during which

I can honestly say I didn't see a single house that hadn't been damaged in some way; that hadn't at least had its windows shattered. As I walked through these shattered streets I could hear the guns roaring in the distance—and not in the very great distance either, because the Russians are now within six or seven miles of Viipuri. But it was a quiet day as days go on the Isthmus now. That is to say, one could distinguish individual shots instead of hearing what sounds like a continuous roll of monstrous drums. The city itself was not being badly shelled. Only three times did I hear the crash of an explosion a few streets away which told how yet another shell had arrived to add to the work of destruction.

It was difficult to make one's way through the streets at all. Bomb and shell craters had torn great holes in them, and every now and then one had to climb over piles of tangled masonry and woodwork. In this part of the town the churches had almost without exception been destroyed. The tower of one big garrison church was still standing, pock-marked with splinters, but the roof had entirely fallen in, and all that was left were the smoke-blackened pillars and the bare walls. As I continued on my way the deep roar of distant artillery mingled with the clanking and groaning of bits of loose metal roofing as they turned and twisted in the wind. Curtains flapped out of glassless windows, and from time to time came a crash of masonry as some long-suffering roof caved in.

Down on the water-front I saw what had once been the German Consulate. It had obviously been left locked up when Viipuri was evacuated. But a large bomb had fallen just outside in the street. And bombs are no respecters of locks and keys. The whole front of the build-



*British Paramount News*

VIIPURI, THE CASTLE



ing had been smashed in, and the main office looked as though a minor war had been fought in it. As I clambered over the wreckage the first thing I saw was the torn and battered picture of the Fuhrer lying where it had fallen. Hindenburg had come off more lightly; he was still on the wall, but with the glass of his frame smashed. In an open drawer of the desk I saw the old tricolor flag of Germany, neatly folded up and put away; and stuck inside the lid of a broken cigar-box was a collection of old Imperial German seals. The filing cabinet had been hurtled to the ground by the force of the explosion, and the files themselves were scattered all over the floor. I wonder what secrets they may have held.

And so, on through those tragic, deserted streets. There is not a soul in Viipuri now, except for a few soldiers. I think the most pathetic things were the shops, particularly the little shops, each of which must have represented the entire wealth of some poor family. They had mostly been left hopefully locked and boarded up when the evacuation took place; but bombs and shells had made short work of such simple precautions. I went into many of these little shops. There was nothing in the world to stop one; and there I saw the stocks of goods that these poor people had been forced to leave behind them. There were hat shops and stationers' and grocers'—but why go into long lists? Try to picture for yourselves any town of about the same size; try to imagine all the shops you know deserted, smashed in, with everything scattered higgledy-piggledy all over the place. It is a truly pitiable sight.

I tried to find a very good grocer's shop where I had bought provisions for my last journey back from Viipuri. It just wasn't there. Where it had stood was a mass of

brick-dust and rubble. And then I went to look at the Knut Posse Hotel where I had stayed. It was on fire. It has been smouldering away for days now, and smoke was curling out of the empty window of the room I had slept in. I went to look at the place in which I had taken shelter during that air-raid. A heavy bomb had scored a direct hit on the building above it, and now it was impossible to get into the shelter. The whole thing had caved in. That made me stop and think. Because if that bomb had fallen then I don't know how many people would have lost their lives, for it was absolutely crammed at the time.

I've tried to give you a picture, to tell the story of the almost complete destruction of what was once a very beautiful town, to describe a vast scene of desolation such as I have never seen before, and never hope to see again: a scene which this bitterly cold winter has made look even more terrible. A thick coating of ice covers many of the buildings and great icicles hang from charred and blackened houses, witnesses of the heroic efforts of the Finnish firemen.

The last place I saw was the big market. The windows were all broken and the stalls were just as they had been left. Rows of frozen chickens were on one stall and piles of fish on another. Oh yes, there are plenty of goods of all sorts still left in Viipuri, but they will never be left for the Russians. For one certain thing is that the Finns will, if necessary, complete the work of destruction by burning the whole city to the ground.

*In retrospect, LONDON*

WHEN I got back from Viipuri, I decided that it was

about time I returned to England. I had seen almost all there was to see in the country. I had been to nearly all the fronts. From a broadcasting point of view it was unlikely that anything else I might see would give me a new line of approach. In short, if you have described a thousand dead Russians once, it is enough. Your reactions on seeing a further thousand dead Russians, under more or less similar conditions, are liable to be—similar. And so, as I say, I decided to leave Finland. My idea at that time was to return in the early summer, when the thaw would be over and a completely different type of warfare would be taking place.

I could not get a reservation on a plane for over a week, and in the meantime we had daily air-raid alarms in Helsinki. They were just alarms. No bombs were dropped. Sometimes Russian aeroplanes appeared over the city, to be shot at by anti-aircraft guns; but apart from annoying everybody and dislocating the life of the city, no damage was done. During this week I did some feature broadcasts about life in Helsinki.

Then my friend, Georges Kessel of the *Paris Soir*, suddenly disappeared. The next thing we heard was that he had filed a story from Stockholm giving the sensational peace terms demanded by the Soviet. After this the talk in Helsinki was of nothing but the peace terms, and whether or not they would be accepted. But it was all talk. The censorship became so rigid that it was impossible to send out any news at all, even if one managed to hear any. So, after further deliberating whether I would stay in Finland or not, I decided to keep my reservation on the plane and to look for better luck in Stockholm.

HELSINKI, *March 2nd, 1940*

NOT a day has passed for some time now without Helsinki hearing at least once the maddening, lugubrious sound of the air-raid sirens. Yesterday we were lucky, having only one short warning in the morning. But a couple of days ago we had three, one of them lasting for just over three hours—it was the longest since the first day of the war. And several days earlier still, things got beyond a joke altogether when we had seven alarms.

Imagine the effect which this has on the life of a big town, because the Finnish people treat these alarms with the greatest respect. They go to the shelters at once and they stay there until the all-clear. And that is why the civilian casualties have been so remarkably small in spite of the fact that the Russians have subjected Finland to the most intensive bombardment from the air that any country has yet known, save possibly China.

When the alarm sounds, everything stops automatically. Shops shut, cinemas close, the telephone is cut off—even internal telephones in a hotel; lifts don't work; you can't send a telegram; restaurants turn one out into the street—in fact eating is a sort of game in which it is up to one to beat the sirens. With any luck, breakfast is all right, because the first alarm doesn't generally come before about eleven. But lunch is another story; any time between one and three

is a very apt time for the second warning; and so you're lucky if you manage to get through the meal without having to leave a half-eaten steak on your plate. If one reaches the coffee stage one can congratulate oneself. You see, one's not allowed to sit on comfortably in the restaurant and die in peace if the bombs do come. No, you are hustled out of the place forcibly, without even being asked to pay your bill. You're expected to do that after the all-clear, or next time you go to the place. It is a really fantastic state of affairs; for instance, I went to a place for a drink the other evening, and they said that perhaps I'd like first the fruit salad which I had not had a chance to have for lunch about four hours before.

When an all-clear siren does sound, it's pandemonium among the journalists in the hotel where most of us stay. Nobody has been able to send a telegram or get through a phone call for maybe a couple of hours or so. Nothing has been censored, because the censor doesn't work during an alarm. And so the rush to get stories passed and sent off is terrific. It's not so good for me, either. I do my broadcasts at 2.30 in the afternoon, which has become a peak alarm period. It doesn't really matter so long as the lines between Helsinki and Lahti, the transmitting station, haven't been broken. But you never know that until the last minute; and of course it may happen half-way through a talk. If there is an alarm I have to do my talks from a little basement emergency studio, which, as a matter of fact, is the only air-raid shelter I've been into here except once when they made me spend about ten minutes in the shelter under a big department store where I'd been doing some shopping.

But, as I said before, all these shelters are packed with the civilian population, and within a couple of minutes of an alarm you won't see a soul on the streets except A.R.P.

wardens and other officials. The foreign Press wear a yellow armlet on their coats, which entitles them to go where they like during a raid. And now I've got into the habit of going along to one of the tallest buildings in Helsinki and getting up on the roof, where you get the most wonderful panoramic view of the city and the country around. One of these days we're going to get a ring-side view of things from up there, but in the last few days I've only been able to hear distant bombing and I've only seen Russian reconnaissance planes flying over. And they soon disappear when the anti-aircraft shells begin exploding near them. I suppose they are taking photographs, which, I should think, may very well mean that we are in for some trouble soon.

Meanwhile, as I say, even if no bombs are being dropped on Helsinki, these alarms are quite enough to disrupt the whole life of the town. How shops and factories and businesses keep going as they do is really incredible. Their employees are paid to work, say eight hours a day, and out of that they may have to spend two or three or even more hours in a shelter. And then they'll probably have to go back to work without getting anything to eat. But the fact remains that the people seem to take all these alarms absolutely as a matter of course, and the whole business of taking shelter is carried out calmly and efficiently and without any fuss. And so, nuisance though they are, I think these bombless alarms will prove to have been a blessing in disguise, because the people have got to know their job so well that when and if the bombs really do come, the chances of heavy casualties should be very remote. In fact, the only people who are likely to get it in the neck are the foreign journalists, who take no precautions whatsoever and almost invariably stand in the most exposed places possible.

HELSINKI, *March 5th, 1940*

OF the two months I've been in Finland I suppose I've spent about a third of the time in Helsinki, in this mad-house of foreign journalism—the Kaemp Hotel. It was packed when I first came in the early days of January, and it's still packed now. Most of the faces have changed; there is no longer the bevy of Scandinavian women journalists who looked like the front row of the chorus of a Cochran production—and, I suspect, wrote like them as well; but some of the old-timers are still here, and one thing which hasn't changed at all, except that it has got worse, is the utterly crazy atmosphere of the whole place.

It took one some time to get used to it at first, and now I think it is going to take an even longer time to get used to anything else. Because when you live long enough in a place like this you inevitably begin to get a little crazy yourself. You see, here we are, representatives of about a dozen nations, I suppose—about a hundred of us altogether, and most of us live in the Kaemp. The life of the place centres around the dining room, which is packed at all hours up to 10.30 p.m., when it closes, and the Press room.

The Press room is a biggish room at the top of a flight.

of stairs on the first floor. Outside it you will see a large blackboard, on which you will be told that the official communiqué will be given out that evening at 5.30 p.m.; that there are no more trips to Viipuri and the Isthmus, where everyone wants to go; that there are vacancies for some trips to Kajaani and Rovaniemi, where probably nobody wants to go. You will also see a large notice written in several languages saying that the room is reserved for 'journalists only.' And so, if you can lay any claim to being a journalist—probably also if you can't—you will push your way through the double swing-doors and find yourself in a large room with a long table running down the centre. On the table are trays containing past communiqués in various different languages; on the walls are large-scale maps of Finland with coloured pins stuck in them showing the probable positions of the two armies; there is a chart showing how to convert Centigrade into Fahrenheit, which used to cause the Anglo-Saxon contingent a deal of trouble at one time. And in one corner of the room there is a big board propped up on an easel, covered with official Finnish war photographs. If you go into this room in the late morning or early afternoon you will probably find one or two journalists there, a Press officer maybe, a couple of boys who take your messages to the censor, and certainly one of the extremely efficient *lottas*, who really run the place.

But if you want to see the Press room in full swing you should go along there any late afternoon when the official communiqué is being given out. Nearly everyone is in the room several minutes before the advertised time; and the people to watch are the agency men—the correspondents of the *United Press*, *Associated Press*, *Reuters*, and so on.



They've already booked their telephone calls to Copenhagen or Amsterdam; blitz-calls, if they think the news is going to be particularly important; and the moment the advertised time of the communiqué comes along the calls begin to come through. There is a certain amount of luck as to who gets his call first, but to beat the rival concern by a minute or two is a matter of vital importance.

Sometimes the communiqué comes in late, and then you can see agonised correspondents hanging on to the telephone with the tolls ticking up as the minutes go by. Blitz-calls, by the way, cost nine times the ordinary rate, and holding the line open for twenty minutes the other day cost one of the agencies over fifty pounds! The communiqué arrives in the end in the form of a pile of mimeographed sheets in all the different languages. Then comes an immediate scramble to get the first copy. And it's very liable to end in your getting the Swedish or Italian one by mistake.

I suppose the two things which cause most of the fights among the journalists here are the censorship and trips to the front. When a trip is announced almost everyone who isn't in on it thinks he has been shamefully treated. And it's the same thing with the censorship. Everyone is always complaining that something has been cut out of *their* story which has been passed in someone else's. No one, in fact, is ever treated fairly. Or that, at any rate, is what you would think if you wandered idly around the Kaemp listening to conversations.

Incidentally, the other day a dinner was given here for the foreign correspondents and Press officers, the purpose of which was to explain the aims and objects of the censors. But these mystery men of the Hotel Kaemp didn't turn up.

themselves. They remained, as ever, anonymous, and contented themselves with sending down an official document explaining their views. This shroud of mystery which hangs over the censors really is an extraordinary thing. I, personally, have never consciously seen a censor, though I suppose they must go out sometimes and eat meals in the dining room like other mortals.

I think the majority of the outside world looks upon Helsinki as a kind of semi-fabulous place which is very much in the news these days. I know that was the impression I got when I talked to London on the telephone the other day. I was with Virginia Cowles when she was trying—and trying is the word—to telephone her story to the *Sunday Times*. The man at the other end was evidently having a lot of trouble with her American accent, so I took over for her half-way through. At the end of it all I told him my name, and he said he'd just heard a talk of mine in the one o'clock news; then he added: 'D'you really mean to say that you're talking now from Helsinki?' I said certainly I was. And then with a note of utter incredulity in his voice he added: 'But is it all right there? I mean, it seems hardly possible that I'm talking to someone in—*Helsinki*!' And, talking about telephone-calls, it really is amazing to listen to Walter Kerr of the *Herald Tribune* putting over his stories direct to New York. He'll be sitting back in an armchair in the crowded Press room talking right across the Atlantic in a perfectly normal voice just as if he were talking to someone's room in the hotel.

The different nationalities among the foreign correspondents keep pretty well to type. The British grumble. The French go all out for human interest stories; they

think their readers are much more interested in the fact that the Finnish soldiers on the Salla front have reindeer-stew for supper rather than in some tactical military move. And I'm not sure they're not right. Of the Germans, one has lost interest in present-day German journalism and has joined the Finnish Army, whilst the other occasionally sends very scanty telegrams and doesn't look as though he is enjoying his job overmuch.

I'm leaving for England for a spell to-morrow, and it's going to seem funny reading about this war from the other end, knowing all the people who are writing the stories; looking at the *United Press* tapes at the BBC and thinking of Ed Beattie and Ralph Forte fighting to get their calls through. And it's going to be interesting too, to learn something about the other war, of which I've heard practically nothing for the last two months.

*In retrospect, LONDON*

At length the day came for me to leave Helsinki. It had been impossible to book a place on the plane flying from Abo, but I had a seat on the one which left from Vaasa, about half-way up the Finnish coast off the Gulf of Bothnia. This was a considerably longer journey, but it was said to be by far the most comfortable way. You just got into the train in Helsinki at ten o'clock in the evening, spent the night in a comfortable sleeper, and arrived at Vaasa the next morning in plenty of time to have a good breakfast and catch the noon plane for Stockholm.

This sounded very nice, but, unfortunately, at eight o'clock the next morning we were still about two hundred.

miles from Vaasa. At every station where we stopped, the man with whom I had shared a sleeper asked me in broken English: 'Is this Vaasa?' I don't know how many times I replied resignedly that it was not, nor was it likely to be for hours and hours.

We reached a big railway junction about lunch time, and I went to the buffet with Virginia Cowles, who was also leaving for Sweden, to have a quick lunch. We were told the train would stop there for a quarter of an hour, but we needn't have hurried. It waited six hours to allow a number of hospital trains to pass. Finally, we reached our destination at midnight.

It was pitch dark outside and I went through the station in the rather vain hope of finding a taxi. As I had expected, there was no taxi, no sledge, no form of transport of any kind. I went back to the train where Virginia was guarding the luggage, and there found Herbert Uxkull of the *United Press*, who had met every train since early that morning in order to tell us that he had arranged for all of us to drive to Sweden across the ice of the Gulf of Bothnia. Certainly this sounded a wonderful idea.

Although we were both pretty dead beat we went off at once to get our exit papers put in order. It was going to be quite a party, for Herbert's sister, whose husband was Finnish, was taking her two children across to Sweden, making six of us altogether. We were to start at two o'clock in the morning.

Our driver was a very tough-looking customer, who had been a bootlegger when Finland had had prohibition. One of the party had not got a Swedish visa, but the ex-bootlegger saw nothing to worry about in this. He knew every inch of the coast, and promised to see to it that we

went ashore at a place where there would be no Customs formalities.

We then went to the hotel in an attempt to get something to eat. The effort was not a triumphant success, but we did at least get something. And then the first blow fell. We were told we couldn't leave Finland until eight o'clock, instead of at two. The hotel was full, and we all had to doss down on tables in the dining room. It was not difficult to be up at seven o'clock the next morning, ready for the journey across the ice.

It was by the ice route that most of the supplies for Finland came from Sweden. Every day convoys of lorries stacked high with supplies of all kinds came along the single track which had been ploughed through the deep snow covering the ice. When we got near the starting point we found a long procession of vehicles of all kinds waiting to be given the word to start. We left the car in the line and went into a café for breakfast. But there was more bad news in store. We were told that owing to the heavy snow which had fallen during the night a convoy of thirty-two lorries was stuck in the middle of the gulf, so that it would be impossible for us to start until late that night at the earliest.

Thus our whole scheme had to be abandoned. We went instead to the air-line office, to see if we could get seats on the afternoon plane, and found the place crowded with children who were waiting to be evacuated. After a certain amount of argument they gave us two seats on the condition that we took a child each on our knees.

I met my sleeping-car companion of the day before at the airline office. He turned out to be Colonel De la Rocque, the leader of the French Fascist Party—the *Croix de Feu*.

He had been on a very 'hush-hush' visit to Finland to study conditions, and was on his way back to Paris to report the progress of the war. He must have got there just about a day too late.

I hope never again to be on an aeroplane so overladen as the one which finally bore us to Stockholm. I had a small boy on my knee the whole way over. Virginia Cowles was lucky—or perhaps clever. She sat in the radio operator's seat, right in front, where there was only just room for herself. But I had no real cause for complaint. The little four-year-old boy in my charge was the best behaved youngster I ever saw. He thought me a little mad because I couldn't talk to him, but I hope I made up for this in his eyes by making toys out of paper, and sticking a lot of odd foreign coins of very small denominations into his money box.

We dined with the British Minister that night, and later thought we might look in at some restaurant or night club where there was music. But Stockholm, although it is, I think, one of the most beautiful towns I have seen, is no place for anyone looking for a night out. I do not know what the Swedes do with themselves in the evenings, but there is certainly nowhere to go. I believe one restaurant a night is allowed to stay open until one o'clock in the morning.

The next evening, by what was to turn out to be a great stroke of luck for me, I was introduced to M. Erkko, the Finnish Minister to Sweden. I sat next to him at his table in the Grand Hotel after dinner, and talked to him for hours. All through the day Stockholm had been alive with rumours concerning the negotiations in Moscow. We already knew the original terms, which everyone,

M. Erkkö included, agreed were impossible. The alternatives seemed to be, peace on more favourable terms or else a breakdown in the negotiations, in which case a terrific Russian attack both by land and air appeared imminent. In either case, I wanted to get back to Finland. I told M. Erkkö this, adding that it was extremely difficult to get a seat on a plane. He told me that if I gave him an hour or two notice he could arrange matters, and soon after this the party broke up.

All next day the rumours grew. I had lunch with the two *Reuter* correspondents, but nothing definite was yet known; and after lunch I went back to the hotel to do some work. I intended to go to the British Legation at four o'clock to have a talk with the Press attaché. But at about half-past three Virginia Cowles came up to my room to say that she had just been told that peace seemed absolutely certain. It was still only rumour, but it made it seem more necessary than ever to get back to Helsinki. I remembered what M. Erkkö had said the night before, and decided to ask him if he could get us two seats on a plane. When he came to the telephone, however, I changed my mind and asked him instead what was happening in Moscow. To my surprise he came out with the news that a settlement had been reached—in other words, the war was over. He said the treaty had not yet been signed, and he did not know the precise terms. I asked him if he could get me two seats on the first available plane, and he promised to do so. He promised that the plane would leave that night. I hung up the receiver, realising that I had a world scoop in my pocket.

The trouble was—how to get it over to London. Communications from Stockholm were terrible. Virginia said

she would put through a telephone call to London while I went across to the Post Office to send a telegram. Here they informed me that there was no 'urgent rate' for telegrams in operation. I must send my message at the ordinary Press rate, and with luck, it should be in London the same evening. This was practically useless, but I sent it, none the less, and then rushed back to the hotel.

Here I found that they would not accept my telephone call. Almost frantic, I got on to the Press Attaché at the British Legation and asked him to do everything he could to get the call through. After what seemed an endless delay he phoned back to say that they would put the call through but that he had no idea how long it would take. Then M. Erkkö's secretary telephoned to say that seats had been booked on a plane leaving Stockholm at seven o'clock. I was terrified lest the call to London should not come through until too late, so in desperation I got hold of Harold Callender, of the *New York Times*. Knowing he did not represent any opposition, I said I'd give him a good story if he would put the call through to London for me, if necessary. He at once agreed, and when I told him the news he put an immediate call through to *Press Wireless*, Amsterdam. Then we sat down and waited.

First, the Amsterdam call came through. We filed the message to the BBC and the *New York Times*. Then, when I had almost given up hope, the London call arrived. I had asked for a personal call to R. T. Clark, the Senior News Editor, but they had put me through to another Clark at the BBC! I was frightened to death that if I had the call transferred it might cut the line between Stockholm and London. But I had to chance it. After what seemed an eternity someone else answered



and said that R. T. Clark was talking on another phone. This was really too much! I shouted:

‘Do you realise I am talking from Stockholm, and I’ve got some really important news?’

I was then told that my *Press Wireless* telegram had just arrived and was going through the Ministry of Information at that moment. I implored them to get the story into the six o’clock news, and said I was going straight back to Helsinki.

After this there was some frenzied packing and a rush to the airport, all of which turned out to be unnecessary, since the plane left at nine-fifteen instead of at seven.

I heard several people, including a Finnish colonel, say that they had heard the news on the six o’clock news and that they didn’t believe a word of it. One of them said he thought it had been given out by Ward Price! So I knew my efforts had not been in vain. But I lay low and said nothing.

For the second time, and with the same pilot who had flown me over two and a half months before, we made that miraculous landing in Abo. But this time the front six seats had been taken out, and in their place were wooden boxes marked ‘Explosives Class II’, which made things even more precarious.

I finally reached Helsinki at eleven o’clock the next morning, and the following broadcasts tell the rest of the sad story.

HELSINKI, *March 13th, 1940*

I ARRIVED back in Helsinki this morning from Stockholm at the very moment it was being made public that the war was at an end.

When M. Erkko, the Finnish Minister in Stockholm, told me on the telephone yesterday afternoon that a solution in Moscow had been found, though the peace had not yet been signed, it was only too plain that it was a mere question of hours before this happened. M. Erkko got me a seat on a special night plane from Stockholm to Abo the same evening and Finnish officers and even Swedish journalists who were my fellow-passengers absolutely refused to believe that peace, under the terms that we understood Russia was imposing, was possible.

Even early this morning on the bus from Abo to Helsinki we were given the usual injunctions about air-raids, and all the people on the bus still refused to believe that peace was possible.

But, as I say, when I reached Helsinki, the news was being given out—and it was a peace under more appalling and drastic terms than were even at first supposed. When I came into the Hotel Kaemp this morning the atmosphere was a mixture of consternation and utter depression. Every-

one had known that since the Finnish delegation had gone to Moscow peace was at least likely. Then hints of Soviet Russia's terms had filtered through, and they were thought to be impossibly severe. Even when I got the news in Stockholm last night that a settlement had been reached, it was thought that the demands had been modified. But in the end, far from it—they are worse. You know what they are by now, and you've only got to look at the map of Finland to see what they mean. And then compare them with the original terms of November last year, and you must realise that the most heroic war that I suppose has ever been fought against terrific odds, has been fought in vain ; has resulted in yet another small country being crushed by a powerful neighbour.

Think of the brilliant victories which the Finns have won, fighting their own specialised guerilla warfare : Suomussalmi, Salla, North Ladoga—and realise that it was only where they were up against insuperable numbers on the Isthmus, in a totally different kind of warfare, that the defeat came. Think too, of the terrible destruction all over the country. Think of the countless refugees who have left the country.

The total Finnish losses in this war are estimated at between ninety and a hundred thousand men—a staggering figure when you consider that the entire population of the country is under four millions. Of this casualty total, no less than thirty thousand fell on the Isthmus during the last month.

I wish I could really describe what Helsinki is like to-day—the saddest day this country has ever known. All day long the radio is blaring. M. Tanner, the Foreign Minister, spoke a short time ago. I was in the Press room

in the Hotel Kaemp when he was talking. Although most of the people in the room couldn't understand a word of Finnish, I never saw such attention paid. The tone of his voice conveyed enough in itself, but one sentence summed it all up:

'Peace has been restored—but what kind of a peace . . . Henceforth our country will continue to live as a mutilated nation.'

To-day is a day of speeches. President Kallio is talking later, and also Field-Marshal Mannerheim. They will be sad words.

To-night, I suppose, there will be lighted streets in Helsinki once again. Maybe the restaurants will stay open later. There may be other relaxing of restrictions. But all this will be cold comfort to the Finnish people in these tragic days in their history.

HELSINKI, *March 14th, 1940*

YESTERDAY afternoon was one of the most depressing I think I have ever spent.

For a couple of hours or so I walked round the streets of Helsinki. The flags were everywhere at half-mast. The streets were everywhere more crowded than I have ever seen them. I suppose the people who, while the war was on spent most of their time at home for fear of air-raids, had now come out into the town. The stoicism of the crowd was an extraordinary thing. To look at their faces you would never guess their real feelings—the feelings of consternation and humiliation which this peace has brought them.

During the few days I had been away in Sweden, Helsinki had evidently been preparing for further severe aerial bombardment. The already heavily shuttered shops were being reinforced, and all the more important statues in the city were enclosed in pyramids of thick planks. They had evidently started on one of these early this morning, but when news of the peace had come through the work had just been left, half-completed, with stacks of wood lying on the ground round the base of the statue. Finland derives most of her wealth from timber, but wood is going to be at a discount in the big towns for a long time to come.

In the course of my walk through the town I went into Stockmanns, Helsinki's big department store. In contrast to the crowded streets outside, the shop was almost deserted. Nobody felt inclined to buy anything on a day like this, and the girls stood idle and dejected behind the counters. There is an extremely efficient girl who acts as interpreter to foreigners, and I went up and spoke to her. I asked her what she felt about the news, but she just made a gesture of despair and was on the point of bursting into tears.

She didn't have to say anything. She felt the same as every Finn in Finland is feeling; and not only the Finns, because a more completely and obviously dejected lot than the foreign correspondents—particularly perhaps the Swedish ones, who feel very strongly about their own country's attitude in this war—has seldom been seen.

But I must make one exception to the foreigners in Finland. The peace has been hailed in Germany as a great diplomatic success for them; and late on Tuesday night when it was a virtual certainty, I was told that a group of the German colony in Helsinki were noisily celebrating in a room in the Hotel Kaemp.

I finally returned to the hotel, and there in the dining room were a number of army officers. I went to speak to one I knew quite well, who had acted as my guide when I went to one of the fronts some time ago. He was sitting by himself, but when I spoke to him it was quite obvious that he wanted to be left alone. He just didn't want to talk—not yet, at any rate.

The peace has come as a crushing blow to the army, but at first they will take things calmly, I think. They are tired from the terrific strain which this war has imposed upon

their small numbers. But they are still an unbeaten army, and how they will feel when they have had time to rest and reflect upon these peace terms is another matter. The feelings of very many civilians can be summed up in what an American journalist told me. He was talking to a Finnish woman whom he met in the street, and she said:

‘D’you know what would be the most welcome sound, in Helsinki at this moment? The air-raid sirens!’

HELSINKI, *March 14th, 1940*

SNOW has been falling heavily to-day in Helsinki, to which the Finnish delegation to Moscow returned in the early hours of this morning, and the first shock of the peace news has given way to bewildered apathy. There seems to be a feeling of unreality about the whole thing which was intensified last night by the fact that the black-out was still in force.

Yesterday was a day of radio speeches. After the Foreign Minister, M. Tanner, spoke at noon, and received the foreign Press in the evening, we all waited until the early hours of this morning to hear Field Marshal Mannerheim's order of the day to the Finnish Army—an address which may well have been written during the last air-raid alarm of this war. For the sirens sounded over General Headquarters at eleven o'clock yesterday at the very time that the news of peace was being given out.

To-day, President Kallio has addressed the people of Finland in much the same terms as M. Tanner's speech yesterday. The President reminds the people of the great responsibilities which remain to be borne by the dependents of the fallen, the war invalids and all the other victims of the war, and particularly for the population of the areas



which have to be ceded to Russia under the formidable peace terms which have been forced upon the country.

M. Tanner, at the Press conference he gave last night, said that the people in the ceded areas would be given the right to determine for themselves whether to leave their homes or to stay and become part of the Soviet Union. I think there is little doubt that not a single Finn will accept the latter. 400,000 people are left destitute and homeless by the peace treaty, and though the vast majority have already been evacuated, there still remains the tremendous problem of moving those who are still there.

So this morning every conceivable vehicle has been requisitioned by the Government to deal with this task. It will probably mean that none of the foreign correspondents will be able to go either to the evacuated areas or to the former fronts. In any case, both the civilians and the unbeaten troops would very naturally resent foreigners seeing them at a time when they are feeling so bitter, and I, for one, would find it hard to watch a proud people in this time of national humiliation.

HELSINKI, *March 16th, 1940*

T O-DAY is the fourth day of the peace in Finland. Here in Helsinki, outwardly, at any rate, the people appear to be getting used to it. The heavy boards are gradually being taken down from the shop fronts. One sees less of the air-raid shelter signs. The streets are, of course, lit up again. It took one some time to get used to that. One had got so used to groping around in the dark.

Walking along rather a dark street last night I saw a woman take a torch out of her bag and flash it rather surreptitiously, just as she would have done last Tuesday night. There are other little obvious ways in which the black-out still stays in the minds of people. The maid came into my room on Thursday night at sundown to pull the curtains. I said I'd rather have what little light was left, and it was some seconds before she realised that she had come to do quite an unnecessary job.

I drove back from the country in the dark yesterday. We had had dinner some way out of Helsinki, and after we had finished our meal we pulled the cowls off the headlights of the car and took out the blue paper which had been put in to deaden the light. It was a thrilling experience driving along those dazzling snow-packed roads with blazing headlights.

In the daytime in the country you notice a difference, too. During the war many houses never lit their fires until after dark because the smoke would give the show away to the Russian bombers. I well remember this custom on the North Ladoga front when I was staying in an extremely comfortable country house belonging to a rich Helsinki business man—it's going to the Russians now, of course. But when I say comfortable, I only mean at night. Because in the daytime we froze in its big rooms. However, even these Spartan precautions didn't stop the Russians bombing the place a few days after I had left. A small bomb went right through the ceiling of the room next to the one I had used.

With the evacuation of property from the areas which have been ceded to Russia going on feverishly now—there is so little time—I have met a lot of people who are moving heaven and earth to get transport to take the furniture out of their houses. One man I met owns, or owned, two houses in Viipuri which he had insured in London. He said he was probably going there to try and collect the insurance. But he didn't quite know how he stood in the matter.

They are strange and tragic circumstances.

### *In retrospect, LONDON*

My last broadcast from Finland, describing the refugees from Hanko, got me into a good deal of trouble. We had all been told that it was impossible for correspondents to go on any further trips because every available vehicle had been requisitioned to help in evacuation. From my own

point of view, the last thing I wanted to see was refugees being forced to leave their homes. But as a broadcaster this was what I needed to complete the grim story I did not know what to do. And then the American military attaché told me he was going to Hanko in his car, and offered me a place.

We got to within about thirty miles of the town and stopped for lunch. Here we ran into a number of other journalists, who said they were not allowed to go any farther. They added that we should certainly be stopped if we tried to go on, but we decided, none the less, to try. And, in fact, we had no trouble. No one paid us any attention.

We spent the afternoon in Hanko and saw all we wanted. The same night we returned to Helsinki, and I wrote my story in the early hours of the morning with the idea of broadcasting it the following day, which was a Saturday, and having it recorded in London for use on Sunday. This was partly because Virginia Cowles had originally arranged the trip with the American Military Attaché, and I did not want my broadcast to clash with her story in the *Sunday Times*. In any event, she filed her story, and then telephoned it after the censor had held it up for nearly two hours, during which he had made only a few minor alterations.

At noon I telephoned my censor at the Finnish Broadcasting House to tell him I should have a broadcast ready for transmission at the usual time. He asked if it was about Hanko—and then the trouble began.

The censor, it seemed, had had strict instructions not to pass the story. I pointed out that, to my certain knowledge, the same story had already been filed by another journalist

who had been in the party; but this had no effect. I could get nothing but a flat refusal. Shortly afterwards the American Military Attaché rang me up to say that he had been accused by the Press authorities of abusing diplomatic privilege by taking journalists to a forbidden area.

Upon hearing this I went at once to see the Press officer at the Hotel Kaemp. He said severely that I knew perfectly well there was a ban on visiting Hanko. I replied that I knew nothing of the kind: I had understood it was simply on account of transport difficulties that correspondents were discouraged from going there. I considered that, since a friend had offered me a seat in his car, I had been perfectly entitled to take it, and I very much resented the suggestion that diplomatic privilege had been abused on my account. Nor had I been present at the Press meeting a few days before, at which, he now informed me, it had been announced that no correspondent should visit the evacuated areas. I then raised the question of the *Sunday Times* article, which I knew was now safely in London, and he said that it had been passed by mistake. It seemed to me a strange mistake, for it had been two hours with the censor, and there had been three separate occasions when it might have been stopped.

However, by now it was clear that there was another element in the situation. The perennial battle between Press and Censor in time of war is full of complexity, even when there is goodwill on both sides. Certain of the other correspondents were feeling decidedly aggrieved because two of their colleagues had succeeded in obtaining a story which they themselves had been unable to get.

The Press officer remained adamant. I was still not to be allowed to make my broadcast. There seemed to be no

point in continuing the discussion, which had by now become somewhat acrimonious, so I decided to appeal to a higher authority. I went to see the head of the Foreign Office. After listening very sympathetically to my tale of woe, he said the whole thing was ridiculous, and promised to get matters put right without delay.

No sooner had I returned to the Hotel Kaemp than I was summoned by the Press officer, who now said that if I would submit my text to all the other journalists, so that there should be no sense of injustice, I might make the broadcast. This was preposterous, and I at once refused. However, it was evident that a diplomatic gesture was called for, and I made one. I pointed out that my story was written for broadcasting, and could not, therefore, be of interest to newspaper correspondents. It might, on the other hand, be of some use to the two other radio men, who represented American broadcasting companies. I suggested that it should be shown to them if they wished to see it. And this settled the matter.

The compromise was accepted, 'face' was saved, and I made the broadcast the next afternoon, in plenty of time for it to be given out on Sunday evening in London. As I had expected, the American broadcasters both refused to look at my story.

HELSINKI, *March 17th, 1940*

ON Friday, in what would previously have been called perfect Molotov weather, I drove down with the American Military Attaché to see the evacuation of Hanko. This little town, which used to have eight thousand inhabitants before the war, was the chief bone of contention in the negotiations last November. It was the one point upon which the Finns would not give in, because of its strategic position. And its cession now is one of the bitterest points in the present peace terms.

We drove fast and uninterrupted through lovely rolling country, which looked just like a Christmas card with its little venetian-red wooden houses set off against the dark pine trees and the dazzling white snow. And it seemed strange not to have to worry about Russian bombers, because, as I say, it would have been an ideal day for them. Except for an isolated lorry carrying household goods, we didn't see any real signs of the evacuation—which has to be finished by next Saturday—until we reached Ekkinas, a little town about twenty-five miles from Hanko. And there we saw plenty, because it is the place where the poor people are dumping their belongings for the time being, until they can find somewhere to live.

In the last couple of days Ekkinas has become a regular caravanserai of lorries carrying loads of every possible description. And from there on the way was as crowded as the London-Southend road on a fine bank holiday. It was an endless chain of vehicles of all kinds; lorries, sledges, cars, buses. Those coming from Hanko piled high with furniture of every kind; beds and mattresses, dining-room tables, sideboards, dressers, chests of drawers. Just the whole contents of people's homes. The sort of things you'd be taking yourself if you were moving house, only *your* things would be properly packed and decently hidden in a closed pantechnicon, whilst theirs are piled up as best they can be on whatever kind of vehicle they are lucky enough to be able to get hold of. There's so little time to get everything away, and, quite apart from wanting to save their own belongings, the last thing in the world any Finn wants to do is to leave behind anything whatsoever for the Russians.

Going towards Hanko, and forming the other side of this endless chain of transport, was a long stream of empty vehicles returning for further loads. It all seemed to work very smoothly, which was a remarkable thing, because if one car had gone into the ditch—which is the easiest thing in the world on these frozen roads—it would have held up the whole stream of traffic until it was pulled out again. And that often takes time, as I know only too well.

When we got to within about twelve miles of Hanko we reached the boundary to which the Russians will come under the peace treaty. Just over on what will be the Finnish side was quite a big house, and its owners were busy taking all their belongings out of it and putting them on lorries and sledges. Although they would still be in



Finland, and although it meant abandoning their home, they evidently thought it better to start afresh elsewhere than have to endure their prospective neighbours. And it seemed a terrible thing, driving along those twelve miles, to think of all that stretch of lovely country, all the houses and summer villas one could see through the trees, going so soon into the hands of Soviet Russia.

Just before we arrived in Hanko we saw a sledge approaching, driven by a man whose wife and daughter had squeezed themselves in among the top-heavy load of furniture it was carrying. One of the party wanted to take a photograph of it. We'd all been told in Helsinki that not only would these refugees resent foreigners seeing them just now, but also that anti-foreign feeling might run so high that it might not even be advisable to go near a place like Hanko at all. So we got the chauffeur to ask the man if he'd mind a picture being taken. He pulled up his horse and said:

‘ But why not, why should we mind ? ’

His attitude was exactly the same as many other Finnish people to whom we talked later on. Far from resenting what they might very well have looked upon as intrusion at a time when they were in great trouble, they couldn't have been more friendly and helpful, and they seemed genuinely pleased, too, at the interest we were taking in them.

At last we were in Hanko itself. It has been a favourite objective of Russian bombers ever since the very beginning of the war, and they've damaged it pretty badly. But somehow not so badly as I had expected, and certainly nothing like as badly as Viipuri.

The town was a scene of great activity. People were

emptying their houses into the streets and stacking their belongings on to lorries or sledges, or whatever they'd been lucky enough to get hold of for the purpose. In co-operation with the police, the army is looking after the whole evacuation, both of people and property, and they seem to be making a very good job of it. There is no rush, no excitement—which would be more than excusable, considering the short time they had got. Everything seems to be going most smoothly.

The people apply for transport at the police-station, and whatever is available is handed out to applicants in rotation. It was announced three days ago that all kinds of vehicles had been requisitioned for evacuation purposes, and a fair share of these seem to have found their way to Hanko. Here and there among the rows of white camouflaged cars and lorries I saw a black or dark-painted one which must have been dragged out from its hibernation; it wouldn't have been allowed on the roads a few days ago.

Going along the main street we stopped and talked to two women. They were a widow and her daughter, who between them had made a living running a little summer boarding house, for Hanko was a great seaside resort. They were waiting to be told that a lorry was ready to take their belongings. I asked them where they were going. They shrugged their shoulders and said they hadn't the least idea. Hanko was their home; their little business was there; they had been born and brought up there, and for them it was the only place in the world. They had stayed there all through the bombardments and they'd rather have stayed through a hundred more bombardments than have to face the future in some unknown place. For them the peace was a catastrophe.

A little farther along we spoke to a soldier. He felt the same way about the peace, and was almost speechless on the subject of Hanko, of all places, falling into the hands of the Russians.

The only restaurant which is open in Hanko is the cellar under the town hall. It is crowded from morning till night, and the overworked girls who are trying to cope with the situation have no time to clean or tidy it. So it has become the only rather shabby, rather dirty restaurant that I have seen in Finland.

‘Anyway, the Russians will feel at home here,’ said one of the party who’d been in Russia for some years. ‘They will make it a bit worse, of course, and then it will be just like one of their own.’

I think this is what really upsets the Finns almost more than anything else: the fact that parts of their country are going to the Russians. They wouldn’t mind so much if it was to anyone else; but they look upon the Russians as a different type of people altogether, and the idea of their countryside and houses and belongings going to them is utterly abhorrent. They know they won’t have any idea how to treat these things, and from what I have seen of Soviet Russia, how right they are! This, at any rate, was the opinion of three volunteer hospital nurses. They, too, had been right through all the bombings from the start, working in their hospital. And now they are penniless, and don’t know where they are going to go.

An old man, a factory worker, joined the group just before we left. ‘We’ve had a lot of bombs fall in Hanko since November 30th,’ he said, ‘but the worst bomb of all has been this peace.’

Everyone agreed.

THE next day I left Finland, travelling by the first plane to go directly from Helsinki since before the war.

The same plane carried the Finnish delegation on its way back to Moscow for the final ratification of the treaty.

There was a distinguished gathering, headed by M. Ryti, the Premier, to see them off. We all trudged out from the camouflaged airport across the snow-covered airfield to the waiting aeroplane. The newsreel cameras whirled; the last good-byes were said; the engines roared, and the plane took off. I had hoped to get a glimpse of Helsinki from the air, but the airport was some miles to the west of the city, and I could only get a distant view.

On its way to Abo the plane passed over streams of refugees leaving the ceded areas round Hanko. Far below I could see the long columns of lorries and sledges bearing the people and their belongings away from their abandoned homes.

Two seats in front of me sat M. Paasikivi, who headed the Finnish delegation; he, too, was looking out of the window at the scene three thousand feet below.

I was glad I could not see his face.



